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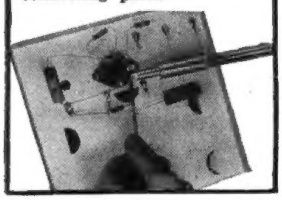

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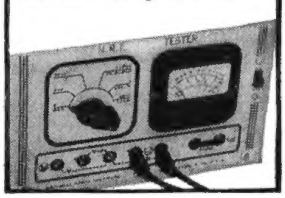

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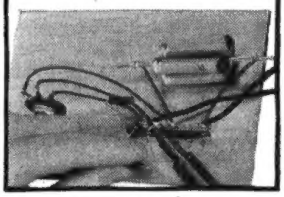

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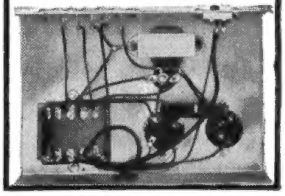

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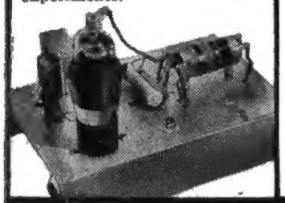

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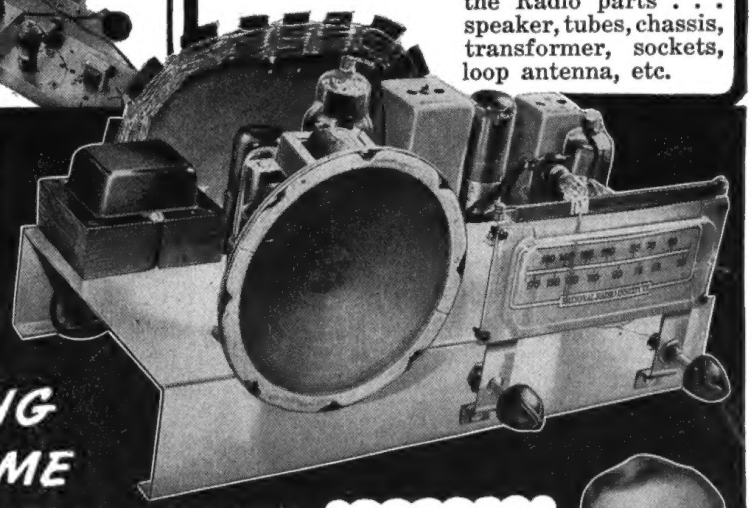

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Vol. XVI, No. 9 SUMMER ISSUE, 1949 20c per copy

A JACK LONDON CLASSIC

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Men fighting for the hand of a woman can be utter fools. Yet there is none greater than he who believes he already has the maiden won.

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A Daughter Of The Aurora

By JACK LONDON

Strong men fighting for the hand of one woman can be utter fools, and there is none greater than he who already believes he has the battle won.

"YOU—WHAT YOU CALL—lazy mans, you lazy mans would desire me to haf for wife. It is not good. Nevaire, no, nevaire, will lazy mans my hoosband be."

Thus Joy Molineau spoke her mind to Jack Harrington, even as she had spoken it, but more tritely and in his own tongue, to Louis Savoy the previous night.

"Listen, Joy——"

"No, no; why moos' I listen to lazy mans? It is vaire bad, you hang rount, make visitation to my cabin, and do nothing. How you get grub for the *famille?* Why haf not you the dust? Odder mans haf plentee."

"But I work hard, Joy. Never a day am I not on trail or up creek. Even now have I just come off. My dogs are yet tired. Other men have luck and find plenty of gold; but I—I have no luck."

"Ah! But when this mans with the wife which is Indian, this mans McCormack, when him discovaire the Klondike, you go not. Odder mans go; odder mans now rich."

"You know I was prospecting over on the head reaches of the Tanana," Harrington protested, "and knew nothing of the Eldorado or Bonanza until it was too late."

"That is deeferent; only you are—what you call way off."

"What?"

"Way off. In the—yes—in the dark. It is nevaire too late. One vaire rich mine is there, on the creek which is Eldorado. The mans drive the stake and him go 'way. No odder mans know what of him become. The mans, him which drive the stake, is nevaire no more. Sixty days no mans on that claim file the papaire. Then odder mans, plentee odder mans—what you call—jump that claim. Then they race, oh, so queek, like the wind, to file the papaire. Him be vaire rich. Him get grub for famille."

Harrington hid the major portion of his interest.

"When's the time up?" he asked. "What claim is it?"

"So I speak to Savoy last night," she continued, ignoring him. "Him I think the winnaire."

"Hang Louis Savoy!"

"So Louis Savoy speak in my cabin last night. Him say, 'Joy, I am strong mans. I haf good dogs. I haf long wind. I will be winnaire. Then you will haf me

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Forty Mile's dark-eyed beauty waited at the finish line. One word from her would establish the winner.

for hoosband?' and I say to him, I say—"

"What'd you say?"

"I say, 'If Louis Savoy is winnaire, then will he have me for wife'."

"And if he don't win?"

"Then Louis Savoy, him will not be—what you call—the father of my children."

"And if I win?"

"You winnaire? Ha-ha! Nevaire!"

Exasperating as it was, Joy Molineau's laughter was pretty to hear. Harrington did not mind it. He had long since been broken in. Besides, he was no exception. She had forced all her lovers to suffer in kind. And very enticing she was just then, her lips parted, her color heightened by the sharp kiss of the frost, her eyes vibrant with the lure which is the greatest of all lures and which may be seen nowhere save in woman's eyes. Her sled dogs clustered about her in hirsute masses, and the leader, Wolf Fang, laid his long snout softly in her lap.

"If I do win?" Harrington pressed.

She looked from dog to lover and back again.

"What you say, Wolf Fang? If him strong mans and file the papaire, shall we his wife become? Eh? What you say?"

Wolf Fang picked up his ears and growled at Harrington.

"It is vaire cold," she suddenly added with feminine irrelevance, rising to her feet and straightening out the team.

Her lover looked on stolidly. She had kept him guessing from the first time they met, and patience had been joined unto his virtues.

"Hi! Wolf Fang!" she cried, springing upon the sled as it leaped into sudden motion. "Ai! Ya! Mush on!"

From the corner of his eye Harrington watched her swinging down the trail to Forty Mile. Where the road forked across the river to Fort Cudahy, she halted the dogs and turned about.

"Oh, Mistaire Lazy Mans!" she called back. "Wolf Fang, him say yes—if you winnaire!"

BUT somehow, as such things will, it leaked out, and all Forty Mile, which had hitherto speculated on Joy Molineau's choice between her two latest lovers, now hazarded bets and guesses as to which would win in the forthcoming race. The camp divided itself into two factions, and every effort was put forth in order that their respective favorites might be first in at the finish. There was a scramble for the best dogs the country could afford, for dogs, and good ones, were essential, above all, to success. And it meant much to the victor. Besides the possession of a wife, the like of which had not yet been created, it stood for a mine worth a million at least.

That fall, when news came down of McCormack's discovery on Bonanza, all the Lower Country, Circle City and Forty Mile included, had stampeded up the Yukon—at least all save those who, like Jack Harrington and Louis Savoy, were away prospecting in the west. Moose pastures and creeks were staked indiscriminately and promiscuously; and incidentally, one of the unlikeliest of creeks, Eldorado. Olaf Nelson laid claim to five hundred of its linear feet, duly posted his notice, and as duly disappeared. At that time the nearest recording office was in the police barracks at Fort Cudahy, just across the river from Forty Mile; but when it became bruited aboard that Eldorado Creek was a treasure house, it was quickly discovered that Olaf Nelson had failed to make the down-Yukon trip to file upon his property. Men cast hungry eyes upon the ownerless claim, where they knew a thousand dollars waited but shovel and sluice box. Yet they dared not touch it; for there was a law which permitted sixty days to lapse between the staking and the filing, during which time a claim was immune. The whole country knew of Olaf Nelson's disappearance, and scores of men made preparation for the jumping and for the consequent race to Fort Cudahy.

But competition at Forty Mile was limited. With the camp devoting its energies to the equipping either of Jack Harrington or Louis Savoy, no man was unwise enough to enter the contest singlehanded. It was a stretch of a hundred miles to the recorder's office, and it was planned that the two favorites should have four relays of dogs stationed along the trail. Naturally the last relay was to be the crucial one,

and for these twenty-five miles their respective partisians strove to obtain the strongest possible animals. So bitter did the factions wax, and so high did they bid, that dogs brought stiffer prices than ever before in the annals of the country. And, as it chanced, this scramble for dogs turned the public eye still more searchingly upon Joy Molineau. Not only was she the cause of it all, but she possessed the finest sled dog from Chilkoot to Bering Sea. As wheel or leader, Wolf Fang had no equal. The man whose sled he led down the last stretch was bound to win. There could be no doubt of it. But the community had an innate sense of the fitness of things, and not once was Joy vexed by overtures for his use. And the factions drew consolation from the fact that if one man did not profit by him neither should the other.

However, since man, in the individual or in the aggregate, has been so fashioned that he goes through life blissfully obtuse to the deeper subleties of his womenkind, so the men of Forty Mile failed to divine the inner deviltry of Joy Molineau. They confessed, afterward, that they had failed to appreciate this dark-eyed daughter of the aurora, whose father had traded furs in the country—before they ever dreamed of invading it, and who had herself first opened eyes on the scintillant northern lights. Nay, accident of birth had not rendered her less the woman, nor had it limited her woman's understanding of men.

Early in the week the camp turned out to start Jack Harrington and Louis Savoy on their way. They had taken a shrewd margin of time, for it was their wish to arrive at Olaf Nelson's claim some days previous to its immunity, that they might rest themselves, and their dogs be fresh for the first relay. On the way up they found the men of Dawson already stationing spare dog teams along the trail, and it was manifest that little expense had been spared in view of the million at stake.

A couple of days after the departure of their champions, Forty Mile began sending up their relays—first to the seventy-five station, then to the fifty, and last to the twenty-five. The teams for the last stretch were magnificent, and so equally matched that the camp discussed their relative merits for a full hour at fifty below, before they were permitted to pull out. At the last moment Joy Molineau dashed in among them on her sled. She drew Lon McFane, who had charge of Harrington's team to one side, and hardly had the first words left her lips when it was noticed that his lower jaw dropped with a celerity and emphasis suggestive of great things. He unhitched Wolf Fang from her sled, put him at the head of Harrington's team, and mushed the string of animals into the Yukon trail.

"Poor Louis Savoy!" men said; but Joy Molineau flashed her black eyes defiantly and drove back to her father's cabin.

MIDNGHT drew near on Olaf Nelson's claim. A few hundred furclad men had perferred sixty below and the jumping to the inducements of warm cabins and comfortable bunks. Several score of them had their notices prepared for posting and their dogs at hand. A bunch of Captain Constantine's mounted police had been ordered on duty that fair play might rule. The command had gone forth that no man should place a stake till the last second of the day had ticked itself into the past. In the Northland such commands are equal to Jehovah's in the matter of potency; the dum-dum as rapid and effective as the thunderbolt. It was clear and cold. The aurora borealis painted palpitating color revels on the sky. Rosy waves of cold brilliancy swept across the zenith, while great coruscating bars of greenish white blotted out the stars, or a titan's hand reared mighty arches above the pole. And at this mighty display the wolf dogs howled as had their ancestors of old time.

A bearskin-coated policeman stepped prominently to the fore, watch in hand. Men hurried among the dogs, rousing them to their feet, untangling their traces, straightening them out. The entries came to the mark, firmly gripping stakes and notices. They had gone over the boundaries of the claim so often that they could now have done it blindfolded. The police man raised his hand. Casting off their superfluous furs and blankets, and with

a final cinching of belts, they came to attention.

"Time!"

Sixty pairs of hands unmitted; as many pairs of moccasins gripped hard upon the snow.

"Go!"

They shot across the wide expanse, round the four sides, sticking notices at every corner, and down the middle where the two center stakes were to be planted. Then they sprang for the sleds on the frozen bed of the creek. An anarchy of sound and motion broke out. Sled collided with sled, and dog team fastened upon dog team with bristling manes and screaming fangs. The narrow creek was glutted with the struggling mass. Lashes and butts of dog whips were distributed impartially among men and brutes. And to make it of greater moment, each participant had a bunch of comrades intent on breaking him out of a jam. But one by one, and by sheer strength, the sleds crept out and shot from sight in the darkness of the overhanging banks.

Jack Harrington had anticipated this crush and waited by his sled until it untangled. Louis Savoy, aware of his rival's greater wisdom in the matter of dog driving, had followed his lead and also waited. The rout had passed beyond earshot when they took the trail, and it was not till they had traveled the ten miles or so down to Bonanza that they came upon it, speeding along in single file, but well bunched. There was little noise, and less chance of one passing another at that stage.

The sleds, from runner to runner, measured sixteen inches, the trail eighteen; but the trail, packed down fully a foot by the traffic was like a gutter. On either side spread the blanket of soft snow crystals. If a man turned into this in an endeavor to pass, his dogs would wallow perforce to their bellies and slow down to a snail's pace. So the men lay close to their leaping sleds and waited. No alteration in position occurred down the fifteen miles of Bonanza and Klondike to Dawson, where the Yukon was encountered. Here the first relays waited. But here, intent to kill their first teams, if necessary, Harrington and Savoy had had their fresh teams placed a couple of miles beyond those of the others. In the confusion of changing sleds they passed full half the bunch.

Perhaps thirty men were still leading them when they shot on to the broad breast of the Yukon. Here was the tug When the river froze in the fall, a mile of open water had been left between two mighty jams. This had but recently crusted, the current being swift, and now it was level, hard, and slippery as a dance floor

The instant they struck this glare ice Harrington came to his knees, holding precariously on with one hand, his whip singing fiercely among his dogs and fearsome abjurations hurtling about their ears. The teams spread out on the smooth surface, each straining to the uttermost. But few men in the North could lift their dogs as did Jack Harrington. At once he began to pull ahead, and Louis Savoy, taking the pace, hung on desperately, his leaders running even with the tail of his rival's sled.

Midway on the glassy stretch their relays shot out from the bank. But Harrington did not slacken. Watching his chance when the new sled swung in close, he leaped across, shouting as he did so and jumping up the pace of his fresh dogs. The other driver fell off somehow. Savoy did likewise with his relay, and the abandoned teams, swerving to right and left, collided with the others and piled the ice with confusion. Harrington cut out the pace; Savoy hung on. As they neared the end of the glare ice they swept abreast of the leading sled. When they shot into the narrow trail between the soft snowbanks they led the race, and Dawson, watching by the light of the aurora, swore it was neatly done.

When the frost grows lusty at sixty below, men cannot long remain without fire or excessive exercise, and live. So Harrington and Savoy now fell to the ancient custom of "ride and run." Leaping from their sleds, tow thongs in hand, they ran behind till the blood resumed its wonted channels and expelled the frost, then back to the sleds till the heat ebbed away. Thus, riding and running, they covered the second and third relays. Several times, on smooth ice, Savoy spurted

his dogs, and as often failed to gain past. Strung along for five miles in the rear, the remainder of the race strove to overtake them, but vainly, for to Louis Savoy alone was the glory given to keeping Jack Harrington's killing pace.

As they swung into the seventy-five-mile station Lon McFane dashed alongside; Wolf Fang in the lead caught Harrington's eye, and he knew that the race was his. No team in the North could pass him on those last twenty-five miles. And when Savoy saw Wolf Fang heading his rival's team he knew that he was out of the running, and he cursed softly to himself, in the way woman is most frequently cursed. But he still clung to the other's smoking trail, gambling on chance to the last. And as they churned along, the day breaking in the southeast, they marveled in joy and sorrow at that which Joy Molineau had done.

FORTY MILE had crawled out of its sleeping furs and congregated near the edge of the trail. From this point it could view the up-Yukon course to its first bend several miles away. Here it could see across the river to the finish at Fort Cudahy, where the gold recorder nervously awaited. Joy Molineau had taken her position several rods back from the trail, and under the circumstances the rest of Forty Mile forbore interposing itself. So the space was clear between her and the slender line of the course. Fires had been built, and around these men wagered dust and dogs, the long odds on Wolf Fang.

"Here they come!" shrilled an Indian boy from the top of a pine.

Up the Yukon a black speck appeared against the snow, closely followed by a second. As these grew larger, more black specks manifested themselves, but at a goodly distance to the rear. Gradually they resolved themselves into dogs and sleds, and men lying flat upon them.

"Wolf Fang leads," a lieutenant of police whispered to Joy. She smiled her interest back.

"Ten to one on Harrington!" cried a Birch Creek king, dragging out his sack.

"The Queen, her pay you not mooch?" queried Joy.

The lieutenant shook his head.

"You have some dust, ah, how mooch?" she continued.

He exposed his sack. She gauged it with a rapid eye.

"Mebbe—say—two hundred, eh? Good. Now I give—what you call—the tip. Covaire the bet." Joy smiled inscrutably. The lieutenant pondered. He glanced up the trail. The two men had risen to their knees and were lashing their dogs furiously Harrington in the lead.

"Ten to one on Harrington!" bawled the Birch Creek king, flourishing his sack in the lieutenant's face.

"Covaire the bet," Joy prompted.

He obeyed, shrugging his shoulders in token that he yielded not to the dictate of his reason but to her charm. Joy nodded to reassure him.

All noise ceased. Men paused in the placing of bets.

Yawing and reeling and plunging, like luggers before the wind, the sleds swept wildly upon them. Though he still kept his leader up to the tail of Harrington's sled, Louis Savoy's face was without hope. Harrington's mouth was set. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. His dogs were leaping in perfect rhythm, firm-footed, close to the trail, and Wolf Fang, head low and unseeing, whining softly, was leading his comrades magnificently.

Forty Mile stood breathless. Not a sound, save the roar of the runners and the voice of the whips.

Then the clear voice of Joy Molineau rose in the air. "Ai! Ya! Wolf Fang! Wolf Fang!" Wolf Fang heard. He left the trail sharply, heading directly for his mistress. The team dashed after him, and the sled poised an instant on a single runner, then shot Harrington into the snow. Savoy was by like a flash. Harrington pulled to his feet and watched him skimming across the river to the gold recorder's. He could not help hearing what was said.

"Ah, him do vaire well," Joy Molineau was explaining to the lieutenant. "Him—what you call—set the pace. Yes, him set the pace vaife well."

SHE-BAIT FOR THE RED COAT TRAP

By LES SAVAGE, Jr.

She could hold a man at bay with a gun . . . or hold him close with a kiss. Yes, the dark, bewitching beauty of Charlotte Dumaine was lusty bait to tempt the harried Red Coat in that lonely land of the white snows.

DIVISION G covered northern Alberta with headquarters at Edmonton, and the superintendent's office here had the usual nebulous austerity reflected in most official quarters of the Royal Mounted Police. The inevitable maps formed their precise geometrical pattern on the wall behind Superintendent Corbett, who sat at a broad desk with no more papers on it than necessary. He was a small man with careful, reserved eyes in a face scored deeply by former duty in the seasons of this land.

"Glad to have you, Inspector," he said, standing as Napier entered. He offered a firm, brief grip, then made a meager inclination of his head toward the Sergeant major who had risen from a chair by the window. "This is Sergeant George Sallybrook. We needed someone who wasn't known in this section, so we brought him in from E Division to work with you.

Before Napier could move from the speeding sled the Indian was on him.

Sallybrook, this is Inspector Victor Napier—"

"Of C. I. B.," finished Sallybrook, before holding out his hand. It was an impersonal addition, almost as if the man had spoken to himself. But in the faint flash of light that crossed the sergeant's chill blue eyes, Napier saw the antipathy.

"Haven't you ever worked with the Civil Investigation Bureau before, Sergeant?" Napier asked.

"You'll have to remember it's rather a new department," muttered Sallybrook. But Napier could see it now. Old-line was stamped so deeply into the sergeant major that the impeccable Stetson in his hand

should have been a spiked white helmet. No telling how many horses had gone into the bow of his booted legs, or how many blizzards had etched their cruel history into his ruddy, seamed face. The leg-of-mutton cut to his trousers was faultless and the polish of his Sam Browne harness reflected things like a mirror. The faint sound Corbett made clearing his throat brought Napier's gaze back to him.

"This seems to be centered around Fort Resolution," Napier offered.

Corbett nodded. "That's where the tribes gather every year to get their Treaty Money, of course. We don't know exactly when the counterfeiting started. The country's flooded with it now. You can see what a ticklish problem that presents. Counterfeit can't be explained to an Indian. Either the government bills are good or they're not. It's not the amount of money so much. It's what it stands for. Those peace treaties are the work of centuries, literally. Any change in the status quo would entail enormous loss of face for the Government. If the Indians lost faith over this it would take years to restore the balance. I wouldn't go so far as to predict an uprising. But we'd have our hands full with some of those wilder tribes."

NAPIER dug into his pocket for a pipe. One of the main reasons he had been chosen for the job was his knowledge of the Chipewyan tribes, but he could see Corbett's deep concern, and he let the man go on. He felt a little incongruous, somehow, in his casual, single-breasted pepper-and-salt. There was something sardonic about the quizzical arch of his sharp black brow, lowering its bony prominence heavily over the brooding pools of his black eyes. The outward thrust of his long jaw, to take the pipe in his mouth, only accented its sense of restrained belligerence.

"Surely the Indians must sense something funny is going on," he put in, when Corbett finally paused.

"As long as we keep honoring the money, they'll play along," shrugged Corbett. "Furs are about the only thing worth while for the counterfeiters. They pay the Indians in counterfeit Treaty Money for pelts that would otherwise go to Hudson's Bay or some other legitimate trading company. The Indians naturally head for the nearest Hudson's Bay post to spend the money. The government's ordered H. B. C. to honor the money, and in turn, has to redeem it."

"I understand Hudson's Bay has had a thirty-five per cent drop in their fur take this year," nodded Napier, sucking on his pipe to light it. "Which would indicate we not only have counterfeiters to deal with but fur smugglers as well."

"E Division's watching that," Sergeant Sallybrook offered. "They've had two unidentified craft in the Sound already. We figure they're sending the fur on sleds from here to the coast."

"As good as any," Napier waved out the match, flicked it into a glass tray on the desk. "Ottawa's given up the idea that the money's being printed outside and shipped in. I think that corporal's disappearance up near Resolution was what convinced them. Richards?"

"Richardson," Corbett corrected. "We don't know exactly what happened to him, Napier, but he was working on the case. That's why we need an undercover job now. It's obvious you won't get near them in a red coat. Corporal Richardson left a few patrol sheets and some interviews with traders he took down in shorthand, if you're interested."

"I'd like to see your whole file on the case," Napier said.

Corbett's about face belonged on parade. The files must have been in the next room, on the far side, for his footsteps went out of earshot in there. Napier dropped his hands casually into coat pockets, rocking back and forth on his heels a little. His eyelids drew together. He was apparently studying the wall charts.

"Ever run on drum ice, Sergeant?" he asked abruptly.

Sallybrook's surprise stirred him in the chair. "Plenty, I guess. I've filled out a lot of patrol sheets up there."

"Echoes like hell, doesn't it? So many reverberations you can't tell the bad spots from the good ones."

"You don't like shaky running?" asked Sallybrook.

"Little dangerous, isn't it, when two

men will probably be depending on each other for their lives?"

"See any rotten spots?" asked the other.

"You don't care for C. I. B." It was a statement from Napier.

Sallybrook's heavy jaw muscles bunched. "I've broke in a lot of recruits, Inspector, and one of the first things I try to beat into their heads is how many times they'll have to subordinate personal feelings to the demands of the service."

Napier removed his pipe, studying the bowl. "What are your personal feelings?"

"If a man's an officer he shouldn't be ashamed to wear the uniform anytime, any place."

"It's not a matter of pride," murmured Napier.

"Maybe I didn't use the right word," said Sallybrook. "I just never liked to sneak around the back door when I made an arrest."

"And kicked like a green mule when they changed the spike helmet for the Stetson," said Napier.

Sallybrook's shrug was dogged. "So I'm an old mossback. You'll find a lot of us in the service."

"In any service, Sergeant." Napier's pipe had gone out and he set about relighting it. "There's always a clash between the old and the new. And always something to be said for each."

"The methods I've worked with for thirty years have kept the provinces cleaner of crime than any other given territory," asserted Sallybrook.

"But you've got crime now. Not just some settler going crazy and murdering his wife, or a couple of fur poachers on the Coppermine. Organized crime, Sergeant, and your red coat methods haven't handled it . . ." Napier trailed off as he saw the antipathy still moving turgidly beneath the surface of those chill eyes. He shrugged. "You can beg off this duty if you want."

Sallybrook's chest filled his coat like a barrel. "I've never shirked an assignment yet."

"What if I requested it?"

"Inspector—" a flat, uncompromising tone filled Sallybrook's voice— "I don't think you'd better, of me, or any of my superiors."

"Is that a threat?"

"I just mentioned it."

Corbett came back through the door, closing it carefully behind him. There was no expression on his face as he glanced from Napier to Sallybrook. He put a manila folder on the desk, opened it.

"Richardson's reports and Patrol Sheets," said Corbett. The only notable thing we could gain from them was mention of some woman in an interview with the Hudson's Bay factor at Athabska Landing."

The patrol sheets were made out for the sub-districts with the name of every settler, so the patrolling constable would check each one, and Napier picked up the sheaf of these, thumbing through them. His question was an idle one, even in his own mind, at that instant.

"Some woman?"

"Yes," said Corbett. "Richardson doesn't even mention any name. Why do you ask?"

"Yes." Sergeant Sallybrook was staring at Napier with a new interest. "Why do you ask?"

It must have been some subtle alteration of Napier's face. As Corbett had said, the name hadn't been mentioned in the reports. Neither was it underlined on this patrol sheet, to separate it from all the other names there. Guillaume Dumaine, it said, Great Slave Lake. And after that. Charlotte Dumaine.

II

THE TRAIN RIDE from Edmonton to Waterways took two uneventful days in which Napier tried to acquaint himself with Sallybrook without forcing anything. The man had not tried to hide his resentment at being forced to change from his uniform into civilian clothes, and Napier was constantly aware of that undercurrent of antipathy.

At Waterways they boarded one of the stern wheelers making its spring run up the Athabaska River to Fort Chipewyan. At Chipewyan they got a Peterboro canoe and supplies, and started the long haul up the Slave River to Fort Resolution, the last outpost before the dread Barren Lands.

Spring lay in deceptive beauty over the land, and the first few days were an idyll for Napier. Sometimes they were borne for hours without paddling down the swift currents running in against a chocolate cut-bank; sometimes they spent days gliding in among leafy Acadian islands where stillness from another world reigned. Wild ducks covered the shining white drift logs in amazed rows, but the muskrats squatting in secluded spots along the bank scarcely looked up from stuffing their mouths full of rat grass, as the canoe passed by.

Underneath the idyll, however, like silt waiting to be stirred from the riverbottom, lay the dank cruelty of the land. The fangs showed four days out of Chipewyan. They chanced a run of white water they should have portaged, and the canoe sliced itself apart on a shoal of sharp rocks. Sallybrook laid the flesh of his head open pitching from the ripped craft. Napier had to haul him ashore unconscious.

As soon as he revived, however, the stubborn sergeant insisted on helping Napier salvage what they could. They got the canoe ashore, along with one duffle bag full of food. Wading in the shallows below the accident, Napier found a sleeping roll wedged in the rocks. It was ripped at one end, and something red was sticking out. He carried it ashore, tugging in puzzled, growing anger at the scarlet cloth. Finally the brass buttons of a tunic came free.

He did not try to hide the anger in his face as he raised it toward Sallybrook, where the man had been sitting in the white sand, bloody head between his hands. Slowly, the sergeant stood up, a defiant pallor in his face. There were a lot of things Napier wanted to say.

"Build a fire," he told Sallybrook. "We'll burn it."

"Inspector!"

Sallybrook's one word held everything he couldn't have said in a thousand. There was an intense plea. And at the same time, that sense of flat, latent threat his voice had carried when he had told Napier not to ask that he be dropped from his job.

Napier had read it as stubbornness in the man before. Now he saw his mistake. Now he saw it as a pride so intense it could be painful. The red coat to Sallybrook was a symbol of a service he had devoted his life to, and would give his life for, if necessary. Napier realized how completely he would alienate the man by destroying it.

"You know what it will mean if anyone sees it," he told Sallybrook, finally.

Sallybrook's massive chest lifted with a sharp breath. "I'll take the responsibility, Inspector."

"See that you do," said Napier, tossing the duffle at him. "Now, let's build a fire."

They had not yet gathered enough wood when the Indian appeared from the trees. He came without sound, appearing in the spruce abruptly. Napier saw the startled suspicion in Sallybrook's lifting face.

"Wachee," said the Indian.

Napier answered the universal greeting cautiously. It was impossible to tell the man's tribe by his dress. He had a caribou hide shirt dyed yellow and fringed with moose-hair, and the inevitable rawhide *assian,* a strip of leather passing between his legs and through a belt at back and front, to hang down a foot or so behind and before. He must have had quite a standing in his tribe, for there were half a dozen garters holding up his leggins below the knee, covered with fancy quill work.

"Szi, tzel twi," he said, his grin digging greasy creases into the swarthy face.

"What is it?" said Sallybrook.

"Chipewyan," said Napier. "Might be a Dog rib or a Hare. He wants some tobacco."

"TELL him we haven't got any," said Sallybrook. "We can't afford to lose any more of our supplies. Let him come any closer and we sure as hell will. I never saw one yet who couldn't steal the webbing right out of your snowshoes."

"You forget what we're here for," said Napier. He turned to the Indian. *"Quanachi,"* he murmured. "We'll all make a little fire."

"Will you give me some tobacco then?" asked the man in Chipewyan.

"I'll trade you something for it, then," Napier told him, and started hunting for dry kindling. Grudgingly, the man pretended to kick around in the driftwood but

by the time Napier and Sallybrook had found enough to burn, the Indian still had not come up with any wood.

"Damn lazy maggot-eaters," growled Sallybrook. Glancing at the sergeant, Napier wondered how much chance he was taking in trying to deal with the Indian. He could appreciate what state Sallybrook was in. He himself was jumpy with exhaustion, and the flies weren't helping any. He built a smoky fire and stuck his head in it to try and escape them momentarily. The Indian sat cross-legged before it, blandly ignoring the insects as only a man of his race could.

"What do they call you?" Napier asked, pulling his head out of the smoke.

"Bess Hath," answered the man.

"Crooked Knife," Napier translated for Sallybrook's benefit.

"And I'll bet he'd put it through your back if you turned around," growled Sallybrook.

Napier let that grin twist his lips. "Take it easy, will you, Sergeant? We're going to have to deal with a lot of these people." He took a twist of tobacco from his pocket and showed it to the Indian, asking him in Chipewyan what he would trade for it.

"The pelt of a *tha*," the man answered.

"I don't want a marten pelt this time of year," Napier told him.

The man stared enigmatically at the tobacco in Napier's palm. Firelight glittered across eyes as unreadable as wet black stones. But Napier knew what was going through his mind. Tobacco was priceless in this land where so little was to be had. If an Indian would give his right arm for a beaver tail, he would give his soul for a twist of tobacco. Finally he reached beneath his caribou robe and drew forth his medicine bag. There was something deliberate about the way he pulled his war cap out. Perhaps he wanted them to see it. There were many tribes making up the people who inhabited the country around Great Slave Lake, and most of these tribes had a practice of attaching a plume for every man killed in battle. There must have been a dozen plumes on the cap of Crooked Knife.

He paused, as if waiting for some reaction from them. Finally, he pulled something else from the bag. It was three dollars in Treaty Money. Napier heard Sallybrook's thin inhalation.

"Find out where he got it."

"Take it easy," Napier told him. "He can read you like fresh tracks in the snow."

Sallybrook settled back with a soft curse. "He's not that smart."

It took Napier half an hour to trade the man out of one bill. Then, while the Indian broke off part of a twist and jammed it into his pipe, casting a covetous eye on the rest of their soggy supplies, Napier slipped the bill to Sallybrook.

"It's counterfeit all right," he told the sergeant. "They don't try to make a very good job, do they?"

"Why should they?" said Sallybrook. "It's only the Indians they have to fool. They'd do it with rocks if the Indians would take them. They know the spot they've got the Government in. Find out where he got this, Inspector."

Napier asked Crooked Knife, knowing how foolish it was. He saw that suspicious glitter in those eyes again as the man answered that he had gotten it on Treaty Day at Fort Resolution.

"Liar as well as thief," growled Sallybrook. "If I only had my coat—"

"He'd close up like a bear trap," snapped Napier. "Maybe a red coat can stop a riot but I've yet to see these *Tinneh* talk if they don't want to."

"I could make him talk," snarled Sallybrook, wiping a vicious hand across his gnarled cheek to come away covered with blood and black with mashed flies. He leaned toward the man, all the tension of these last hours filling the line of his body in a rigid culmination. "Where did you get that stuff, damn you?"

The man grinned inanely at Sallybrook. Napier hold the sergeant, "He doesn't understand you. Will you take it easy? You're not in the barracks now and you can't use the same methods up here—"

"He understands me," said Sallybrook, in a burst of rage he might have controlled under less strain. "I'm asking you, Crooked Knife, where did you get it?" The man still only grinned at him, and it goaded Sallybrook beyond control. Napier had been watching for this, but he could

not reach the sergeant before Sallybrook had leaped across the fire to grab the Indian by the front of his robe.

"Now, talk, you thieving Dog rib maggot-eater—"

"Illa, teotenny," grunted the Indian, surging up against the sergeant's grip and trying to tear free.

"Let him go, Sallybrook," called Napier, reaching out and trying to pull the man off.

"When he tells me where he got that counterfeit money," gasped Sallybrook, shaking the Indian like a terrier in a rage. "How about it. You know what I'm saying like it was your own language. Where did you get that Treaty Money?"

With a grunt, the Indian dipped his head, sinking yellow teeth into Sallybrook's hand. The sergeant yelled, jerking his hand free. Napier caught his elbow, spinning him around and away from the Indian. Sallybrook's eyes were blank with rage as he wheeled back, and Napier saw it was going to bring him back in, blindly, and that only one thing would stop him. He ducked in under one clawing hand sunk a vicious blow as deep into Sallybrook's solid belly as it would go.

The sergeant jackknifed and went to the ground. He lay there doubled up, and the sounds he emitted trying to get a breath made Napier gag slightly. He turned to the Indian and told him to get out. The man stared sullenly at Sallybrook, then picked up his war cap and put it carefully back into his medicine bag and faded out into the forest. Sallybrook was retching when Napier turned back to him. When he finished, he sat up.

"I told you we'd never get anywhere with those antiquated spike-helmet methods of yours," Napier said. "Now every Indian north of Chipewyan will know there are two men in the province who want to find the source of that money bad enough to fight for it. I'll eat sour bannocks if they don't add that up to the Royal Police."

III

FORT RESOLUTION was rather a pompous name for such a meager scattering of buildings on the southern shore of Great Slave Lake. Promise of early snow already chilled the air when Napier and Sallybrook reached the place, pulling their battered craft up among the motely collection of birch-bark canoes on the rocky shore. The only sound, as they walked through the glistening lodges of caribou hide scattered across the beach was the yapping of dogs. It was incessant, and it drowned all other noise.

They passed an Indian shouting to be heard above it, and could not distinguish his words. A mob of naked children descended upon the two men, emulating their elders in the plea for tobacco. The two men could hardly keep themselves from beating the little animals off. Finally they were through, and made their way up the trail to the store.

"Here before God," murmured Napier wryly, in that ancient joke of this country mocking the white H. B. C. on the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company which flaunted its tattered banner on a tall pole above the slanting roof. They climbed to the porch, and into the reek of kinnikkinnik tobacco, sweeping from the pipe of a man leaning against one of the unpeeled supports. Napier had the impression of a pudgy, greasy face turned blue around the jowls by a beard, and the bright interest of black eyes following him into the store.

The inevitable odors of sour leather and stale fur and tea assailed him. There was a long solid counter, rounded and whitened down the length of its outer edge by the contact of bodies and hands and belt buckles through innumerable years. A clerk in a shirt of wool plaid stood behind this, stooper a little so the overhead oil lamp shone on his bald pate. Napier had thought it was an Indian woman, at first, standing in front of the counter. The skirt looked Cree, fringed with moosehair, fastened by the stiff, quilled belt behind. The hair was black enough. But it held too much wave. And then she had turned from the counter, stopping the breath in him.

It had been on his mind, of course, all the way up from Edmonton. Ever since he had seen the name on that patrol sheet. Wondering when it would come. And where. An outsider would look upon it

as outrageous coincidence in such a vast country. But in reality, there were so few places for a white man to be, unless he cast off from the settlements. Three or four, at most, this far up. And here it was.

"Vic," she said in a throaty voice. Even in surprise, it still held the old invitation.

"Charlotte." His voice was flat, dead, with the restraint he was putting on himself. But he couldn't keep his eyes from taking it in. The mouth. Rich and full and pouting, putting the thought of a kiss in a man's mind. It seemed made for nothing else. And the strange gauntness to the hollows beneath the high, oblique cheekbones, shading the face with a vague, piquant sense of mystery. And the incessant, restless movement of something just beneath the surface of her big black eyes.

"You're a long way out of Ottawa," she said, finally. Her voice held a small puzzled hurt at his stiffness, but already her glance was taking in Sallybrook behind him. A certain understanding raised her brow faintly. She allowed her eyes to focus for an instant on the plain hide shirt Napier wore. "Not with the police anymore, Vic?"

"What do you think?" he asked.

That lifting brow. "I'm sorry, Vic."

"Forget it," he said. "I don't owe them anything. They don't owe me anything."

"It was different, then," she murmured.

"I was younger, then," he said, against clamped teeth. Half a lifetime of developing a poker face did not help now. She'd always had such a rare discernment of every nuance in him. And there was so much going on now. The coals of an old fire stirred to new glow. And something else inside him he could not define. It was not the same, somehow, as he had imagined it would be, meeting her again. Part of it was the same. But something was different. And all the time, this sparring was made doubly difficult by his consciousness of Sallybrook, right behind, taking it all in.

"Your partner?" she asked, dipping her head in Sallybrook's direction.

"We're running traplines to the north," Napier told her.

"We might see each other," she said. "Dad is angling for a Hudson's Bay post up by Old Graves."

She hesitated, seeming to wait for something. His throat twitched with the words pushing up in it, but what he wanted to tell her he couldn't, in front of Sallybrook. Finally she lifted one shoulder in a vague shrug, and smiling lamely, circled him and went out. Napier moved over to the counter and took out the draft Corbett had given him on the Edmonton Hudson's Bay office. It was signed by the chief factor down there so as to clear them of any police connections, and the clerk nodded his bald head in acceptance.

"We'll start with a couple of rifles," Napier told him. "We lost ours in an upset downriver."

"I've got a couple of good Remington-Hepburns," the man offered.

NAPIER glanced at Sallybrook. The sergeant nodded. "Suits me, long as they're thirty-thirty." He leaned against the counter with a comfortable sigh, watching the clerk make his way into the back room. "Charlotte Dumaine?" Sallybrook said, softly.

Napier had known it would come, sooner or later, he nodded silently. Sallybrook scratched his nose carefully, studying the tinned food on the shelf.

"That was the name on the patrol sheets. Guillaume Dumaine's her father? French. Ottawa French? That's where you knew them, Inspector?" Sallybrook paused, taking in Napier's nod with the tail of his eye. He licked his lips. "Ottawa isn't too far from Big Quill Lake, is it?"

Napier felt himself lift up against the counter. "Drum ice again, Sergeant?"

The man chuckled deep within him. "Not many of us ever get know in this service, Inspector. We go along, do our duties, get shot up or drowned or killed, maybe, nobody ever hears about us but our messmates, and they forget too soon. Only a few names really stand out. I was surprised to find you such a young man. You've built a reputation quick. I guess it really started with the Big Quill Lake affair, didn't it? You weren't with C. I. B. then."

"That's right," said Napier stiffly. "I had a red coat."

"And were proud of it—the way she spoke," smiled Sallybrook, without much humor. "Why should she think you weren't in the service anymore?"

"I wasn't wearing the uniform."

"I got the impression it was something more than that," said Sallybrook. "She was sorry. For what? Did she think you'd been booted out?"

"You and I differ on a lot of things," said the C. I. B. man "The one thing I thought I'd never have to ask you is to mind your own business."

"If it's Police business it's my business," said Sallybrook. "The Big Quill Lake affair was police business. Almost eight years ago, wasn't it? What were they doing? I forget the details. I remember your name. Smuggling, wasn't it? Furs, or something."

"They got their—" Napier was surprised at the savagery of his own voice, "smuggler."

"Yes," murmured Sallybrook, "you did send a couple of men to jail, didn't you?"

"Sallybrook," said Napier, wheeling toward him, "I told you—"

The clerk cut him off, coming back into the room. In stiff reserve they chose the rest of their equipment and then asked about dogs. The clerk said the man on the porch had some animals for sale. He was still there when they emerged, and Napier got a fuller impression. A big beast of a man with the full, sensuous lip of mixed bloods, his shoulders and chest threatening to burst the threadbare flannel shirt, a gut inclined to be sloppy unless held in by the broad, beaded belt that also supported his corduroy pants.

"Sure I got dogs," he told them, waving his pipe. "Hundreds dogs. None of this Indian *gidde* they try for sell you down on the beach, either. Come wiz Portage Marquette."

The kennels were in sight behind a nearby cabin, and he harangued them all the way over. "If you are going over the old canoe route you need good guide to show you the portage till the snow come, *hein?* You have found his cache. Why you think they call me Portage Marquette? Don't answer. Look." He thumped himself on the chest so hard it echoed like a hali-gali. "A bear. See?" He beat eagerly against the back of his bulging neck. "A bull moose. Who can beat me with a packing board? Nobody."

"We don't need a guide," said Napier, as the man opened the kennel gate for them. "How about that Mackenzie River with the docked tail?"

"You never find better moosher," said Marquette.

"Too big," Sallybrook scowled. "Get us something that won't shape up over eighty pounds when it's full of winter feed. How about that one with the blue spots?"

"Good king dog," said Marquette. "He's Yukon River husky crossed with Mackenzie malemute. I get him, *hein?*"

He kicked his way through the cringing, yapping, snarling mass of them to where the dog was hitched, and Napier spoke to Sallybrook. "You don't like them big?"

"Big man, big dog, it's always the same, you'll find a streak of fat in them," muttered Sallybrook. "They'll wear out on the trail first every time. It's their soft spot."

"It's difficult to find a man without a soft spot somewhere," said Napier.

"I suppose so," said Sallybrook. "Some it's liquor, some it's gambling. What's yours, Napier. A woman?"

Napier turned sharply toward him. "Will you forget that?"

"How can I?" said Sallybrook. "If you can't? You know, Napier, I thought I'd hold a grudge against you for that time with Crooked Knife. But I don't have to worry. I told you it was the same with a man or a dog. If they've got a streak of fat, they'll wear out sooner or later. The country will take care of them. It'll get you in your soft spot sooner or later."

Napier halted himself from answering with great effort as Marquette came back leading the mangy looking dog. "I got him from big *Norvege.* That's why his name Trofast. It means trustworthy in *Norvege,* or something, I don't know. Little starve looking now, but wait till you feed him up. And with me for guide. *Sapristi!*" He made vicious, stabbing motions at the

ground with an imaginary gee pole. "Moosh. Haw. Gee. What a driver! Hundred mile run in one day. You don't believe? I prove you." He spread his hands out, rolling his eyes upward. *"Sacre nom,* how can any man be so *marveilleux?* Don't ask me." He drew himself up. "I'll take two dollar a day. No less."

Napier was busy feeling the animal's ground wool. "Not a very heavy pelage here. I told you we didn't need a guide."

The man turned a sly eye down toward Napier and let out a chuckle, or a burp, it was hard to tell, the sound came from so deep within him. "I would even take the pay in Treaty Money," he leered. "If anyone were to question."

IV

WITH DOGS and equipment loaded in their Peterboro and another canoe they had gotten at Resolution, Napier and Sallybrook headed west along the lake-shore, hunting for a campsite from which they could work out of. Napier wanted to lay the traplines as far afield as they could, and thus come into contact with as many Indians as possible, establishing at the same time their own identity as trappers in this land.

About fifty miles down the lake from Resolution they built a cabin, and caught and smoked enough fish to last the dogs. They spent some time hunting to fill their own larder. And then winter was upon them.

Napier had already made his acquaintance in a few Indian camps, passing out gifts and making arrangements with some squaws to make him a fringed shirt. He was on speaking terms with several chiefs, but knew how foolish it would be to push anything or question them too closely about the money. It was about two weeks after the first snowfall that the two men set out separately for their traplines, agreeing to return that evening. Napier found a few martens on his line, and returned in darkness to find the cabin empty. He gave Sallybrook till dawn, and with the first light, started out on his trail.

It had not snowed in two days, and the tracks were not hard to find. One by one, Napier found the man's traps. At the third one, he was surprised to find a white fox. Then, at the fifth, he found Sallybrook.

He could not help feel a stab of admiration for the crusty old sergeant. It looked as if it had all been done very deliberately. The sled had been chopped up for fuel, and had been fed so carefully to the fire

GAS—BEWARE!

One of the greatest dangers in Arctic camping is that of carbon monoxide. When you cook with a primus stove in an unventilated tent or snow-house, remember that Death is standing at your elbow. Even experienced Arctic explorers have succumbed to carbon monoxide poison. They realized that there is a certain amount of ventilation through canvas; but they made the fatal mistake of pitching their tent in the lee of a bluff or a large ice-cake. And during the night this safety-valve was closed when the tent was buried by drifting snow.

Carbon monoxide gas is almost entirely without odor; that is why it is so insidious. It can be produced by charcoal fires as well as primus stoves. It will even pass right through the sides of a red-hot cast-iron stove, just as air will seep through canvas. The only way to combat this camp menace is to provide sufficient ventilation.

First of all, camp in the open—even if the wind is blowing and it is cold. And leave the smoke-vent open. And if, while you are sitting around the stove, waiting for supper to be cooked, you feel a pressure on the temples or hear what may sound like a drum slowly beating in your ears (this is the beating of your pulse), open the tent flap immediately. Let in fresh air! *It may save your life—and the lives of your companions. In an emergency, do not hesitate to slit the tent with a knife, and plunge through the opening; you can return for your sleeping-bag later. If you happen to be in a snow-house, kick out a couple of blocks.*

The treatment for this type of asphyxiation recommended by Prof. Yandell Henderson, of Yale University, is this: "Get into your sleeping-bag. Lie still. Draw deep, even breaths. Keep warm. And drink a cup of coffee, if it is available. Or a bottle of some carbonated water."

If you are burning a primus stove in a tent or snow-house, and have the slightest suspicion that anything is wrong, shut off the stove immediately, grab your sleeping-bag, get out into the open, and crawl into the bag to keep warm. Stay there until you are sure that most of the carbon monoxide has been eliminated from your blood-stream—and from your shelter.

that coals were still warm. The dogs crouched around in a whining semi-circle, staring with puzzled, cocked heads at Sallybrook. He sat against a tree wrapped in all the blankets and the canvas cariole covering, with only one leg out, the ankle held in the vicious jaws of a heavy beartrap.

It took Napier half an hour to pry it loose and by that time Sallybrook had come out of his stupor. After doing what he could for the mangled ankle, Napier made a pot of strong tea and some bannocks.

"Damn thing was made fast with such chains I couldn't budge it," muttered Sallybrook. "I knew I wouldn't last long if I lost my head and started thrashing around. Tear that ankle so bad I'd pass out from loss of blood and freeze to death. Lucky I was close enough to the sled to reach it. I figured you'd be along sooner or later. So I just wrapped up and sat tight."

Napier stared at the ugly, bloody trap. "Isn't one of yours."

Sallybrook nodded on down the little gully. "That's mine with the white fox in it. This was right where I'd pass going for it. I almost stopped the sled on top of it. So much snow drifted over it I didn't even see the thing."

"Or piled on top," said Napier. "You wouldn't have lasted another night out here, even keeping your head that cool."

"Do you suppose it was that Frenchman?" said Sallybrook.

"Marquette?" Napier shrugged. "Just because he grins and mentions the Treaty Money? You'd have arrested him right there if I'd let you. I don't know who it was, Sallybrook, all I know is you've got to get back to Chipewyan or Athabaska Landing."

"It's a good month to Chipewyan. If it kills me, it will do it before then."

"I can't let you stay up here with that," said Napier. "There isn't a decent doctor this side of Chipewyan. It's liable to infect."

"Inspector—" the tone of Sallybrook's voice raised Napier's head sharply—"you know as well as I do you're working against time. Your main chance of finding the source of that money is through the furs bought from the Indians with it. The pelage starts getting mangy come spring. They won't be buying any pelts after that. Your best lead—probably your only lead—will be gone by the time you get back from Chipewyan. Even with the best of luck, you can't possibly make it down and back in under ten weeks. You'll lose this whole year. Probably the whole job."

The logic of it was too complete. But that wasn't what struck Napier the deepest. The same tone had been in Sallybrook's voice when Napier found that red coat. Napier was seeing the man's intense pride again. He was seeing what it would do to Sallybrook to be shipped back in such ignominious defeat.

"You know what a spot you put me in," he told the sergeant. "It's in my hands to take you back, and if I don't, and something happens to you, I'll be responsible."

Sallybrook remained silent, his pride preventing an actual plea. But it was in his eyes, like a dog begging to be included. Napier had a brassy, tarnished taste in his mouth.

"What do you want to do?" he said, dropping his eyes.

There was an eager lilt in the sergeant's voice. "Get that can of lard we use to fry the fish in. Mix it with gunpowder for a poultice and wrap the ankle up tight. Then stuff me in your sled and track down the trapper that laid this bear trap."

IT was a remedy the trappers had used up here for a hundred years for everything from gunshot wounds to broken legs. They got going in half an hour, with Sallybrook poulticed and bandaged and tucked in the cariole, his dogs trailing loose. The man had obscured his trail with great skill in the vicinity of the trap, but by making an ever increasing circle Napier finally picked up shoe tracks where the man had quit trying to cover himself.

The trail led north toward the Barren Lands, coming into a country criss-crossed by caribou trails, almost as ancient as the land they marked, and forming a veritable maze of ditches and sloughs in the snow until in some places it was like traveling over the waves of a windblown lake. Timber here was no taller than a man. It was late afternoon when they came in sight

of the tall pointed poles driven into the ground in a circle. It was an Indian grave, with more farther on, austere and lonely atop a low hill. And then it struck Napier like a blow at the pit of his stomach. Old Graves?

He had to force himself on. They hit the glare ice of a river and were almost upset by a rising wind. Skidding into the snow of a bank, they rose over this and dropped down a slope that overlooked the group of buildings. It looked like a trading post, with a few tattered Indian dwellings of reeds and mud gathered around the three log structures. Napier swung the sled in a great arc from the slope onto the flat, jamming his foot on the claw break to spit a white froth up behind. The native dogs were already yapping wildly and lunging at their chains. Napier had a battle to gather Sallybrook's loose team up and chain them to the sled. The door in the main building had opened by then, and Charlotte Dumaine stood there.

Her hair seemed to have caught the blackest midnight and held it. Her eyes could catch a man the same way. Her fawnskin skirt was so white it looked as if the snow covered it, and the crimson sash binding her waist only made the swell of her breast more noticeable.

"Vic," she said. "You *did* come."

"My partner got his foot caught in a trap," Napier told her.

"Is it bad?" Her voice held genuine concern. "Bring him in. Can we do anything?"

"No more than I've done already unless you've got a doctor around," said Napier. Sallybrook was already climbing out of the sled, and Napier was forced to turn and help him. Between them, they got the man to the door. Napier noticed, before stepping inside, that the shoe tracks they had followed went on past this building and disappeared among the Indian lodges.

It was a big, well-built room, boasting a rough wainscotting of pine. Charlotte's father stood aside to let them put Sallybrook in a chair. He had the girl's vivid face Guillaume Dumaine, with a heavy, lustrous head of black hair, despite his fifty-odd years.

"Caught his foot in a trap, you say," he murmured. "How could that happen?"

"He had a light trap planted farther down the gully," Napier told him. "Somebody put this bear trap right in the spot he would have to cross to reach his own trap."

"They covered it with snow," offered Sallybrook. "And baited my own trap with a white fox to draw me in."

"They say the white fox comes when the lemming migrates," smiled Dumaine softly.

"That so?" Those heavy, somnolent lids had dropped over Napier's eyes, giving them that hooded, disturbing look, as he stared at Dumaine. "You have a trading post here, Guillaume?"

"Yes." The man inclined his head southward. "Charlotte told me she met you at Resolution. We were down there laying in supplies."

"With Marquette?" said Napier.

"Portage?" Dumaine chuckled huskily. "Did you meet him? Modest little fellow, isn't he?"

"Is he around?" said Napier.

The man's raised brows made a washboard of his forehead. "He seldom comes here, Napier."

"That's funny. I got the idea he worked for you."

"Why don't you make Vic's partner comfortable, Dad?" asked Charlotte. "I'll fix something to eat. Help me, Vic?"

The lithe switch of her hips made fawnskin seduction of that skirt, leading him into a kitchen with the walls blackened by smoke behind the sooty pipe of an iron stove. She thrust in some fresh kindling, building the fire, and then put a tea pot on to boil. From this, she faced toward him, something breathless in her voice.

"Tell me the truth, Vic. Are you up here with the Police?"

He smiled wryly. "Is that why you were so distant at Resolution?"

"Did you want it any different?" she asked, sharply. "You weren't much warmer than an iceberg, yourself. I was just meeting you on your own ground, Vic. It was that man with you, wasn't it?"

"My partner?"

"Yes." She was staring intently at him. "Why didn't you want him to know how it had been between us, Vic? If the Police

had found out about me they *would* have suspended you, wouldn't they. Or worse. Is that it? You're still with the Police and they don't know about us at Big Quill."

"WHY do you keep harping on the Police?" he said. "What's eating you, Charlotte? Are you mixed up in something here?"

A withdrawing speculation narrowed her eyes. "What could I be mixed up in?"

"The counterfeiting."

When her words finally came they were in a whisper. "You *do* know."

"Everybody north of Chipewyan knows about that," he said, disgustedly. Then the flesh of her upper arms was warm and resilient in the grip of his corded hands. "Charlotte, what are you getting at? What's going on?"

"That trap was obviously not set in your partner's path by accident."

"You speak as if you know," he said.

"I don't, Vic, I don't. Only your partner would have died if you hadn't reached him. You can see that."

His grip tightened till she winced. "You *do* know, Charlotte. What is it you're trying to tell me?"

"Only that you're in some kind of danger, Vic, you can see that yourself—" Her voice still held that denial, but the focus of her eyes had changed, even in the pain of his grip, till her attention, for a moment, was beyond him, toward the door.

"Your father?" he said, in a husky undertone.

"Don't be a fool!" The heat of her words brought her hard against him. For a moment she stared into his eyes, then her nostrils fluttered with the breath she let out, and she sagged against him, saying in a barely audible, pleading way. "Vic, I don't know what's going on. All I know is you're in danger. If you're not still with the Police somebody must think you are. If you're only trapping, why don't you get out? There are other places. Saskatchewan. Peace River. Why not Peace River? I could meet you there—"

"You said that last time. Quebec, then, wasn't it?"

"And who was it who didn't come?" she flared. "How long do you expect a girl to wait? Do you think I didn't try to get in touch with you?"

He knew a vague, youthful sense of guilt, and could not hide it completely. That switch from regular service to C. I. B. had come just at the wrong time, preventing any trip to Quebec. And how many times afterwards had duty blocked him off from finding her? And how many times afterwards had his loyalty to the service been threatened by his feelings for this woman? Some of the tortured desperation he had known then must have showed in his eyes now, and the sense of guilt he could not hide, for she was looking up at him with a vague, indulgent triumph. Then, it was something else, in her eyes.

He saw it coming. He knew the danger of it, knew how much reason it had robbed him of before. But it was the only way he could tell. He had waited for seven years, and he had to know, now. It started soft and tender, and ended hot and savage.

Finally she pulled her mouth away just far enough to speak, breathing heavily from the kiss. "Now, will you go, Vic? Peace River. Just you and I."

She waited for his answer, arched back over his arm, staring up at him from eyes heavy-lidded as a freshly awakened child's. Then the strange expression on his face must have made its first impression on her, for she stiffened abruptly, asking in a strange, almost frightened voice.

"Vic, what is it?"

"Yes, *mes enfants*," asked Guillaume Dumaine, from the doorway. "What is it?"

V

SALLYBROOK sulked in the cariole on the way out from the Dumaine's place, with the snow spitting in sullen sympathy from beneath the runners. Napier was still filled with the turmoil that kiss had left. He trotted behind the sled in silence.

For seven years he had looked forward to that meeting, to holding her, to kissing her. Yet, now, there was something in him still unresolved. It had been different

from what he'd expected. He was not naive enough to expect it to be exactly as he had dreamed, for so long. The difference lay in something other than that inevitable gap between dreams and reality. Had Guillaume's breaking in like that cut it off too soon? He shook his head, unable to answer that, feeling that if he could only have it again, for a moment, he would know what was wrong—

"You should have taken the whole pack into custody—" Sergeant Sallybrook's voice broke in on Napier's thoughts—"those tracks led right up to the post."

"They were lost in the other tracks among the buildings before they reached Guillaume's place," said Napier. "It could just as well have been one of the Indians."

"Fat chance. You didn't find out anything from them, did you?"

"Not much," Napier told him. "They're a sullen bunch. Most of them wouldn't even let me in their lodge."

"You still in love with Charlotte?" Sallybrook asked.

The abrupt transition took Napier off guard. He held his answer as they reached a smooth downhill run, stepping onto the runners for the ride, where they could talk more easily. Then he spoke in a careful tone.

"What makes you think it was ever love, Sallybrook?"

"I'm not blind. She was mixed in with the Big Quill Lake affair, wasn't she? Why don't you tell me about it?"

Napier was silent, and finally the sergeant spoke again. "Ill tell you, then. A bunch smuggling furs into the States from Big Quill. Charlotte and Dumaine mixed up with it in such a way that you couldn't tie them in clearly. You fall for the gal and she convinces you she's clean. You arrest a couple of small fry to close the case and let the Dumaines get away. And now you're doing the same thing here. You're getting soft just the way you did then—"

"I'm not getting soft and you know it. We would have been stupid to put anybody in custody now. We have no proof of anything."

Napier halted himself with an effort realizing how vehement his voice had become. He jumped off the runners and dropped back, watching the back of Sallybrook's head, wondering if he were smiling . . .

They spent the rest of the trip in silence, reaching the lodge on Great Slave River about dusk. It was the dwelling of an

DRIFTING ICE

Seventy-five or eighty years ago, bowhead whaling north of Bering Strait was a great American industry. Only the whalebone (baleen) from the mouth was taken; and this was sold at an average of $4. a pound. Since a big "right" whale might yield 2,000 pounds of bone, it can easily be seen that whaling in the Arctic was a profitable business. Captains sailed their ships all the way from Nantucket and New Bedford to Pt. Barrow, at the tip of Alaska.

It was a dangerous business, too. In September, 1871, some thirty-nine vessels were trapped between the drifting ice and the beach at Wainwright, on Bering Strait. Hundreds of square miles of ice came inshore, threatening the vessels with destruction; then an offshort wind carried it out to sea again.

The Eskimos had seen this happen before. They were under no moral obligation to warn the skippers; and the salvage value of a crushed ship, to an Eskimo, is incalculable. Nevertheless, they warned the whalers to get out of there—fast! Seven of the thirty-nine captains heeded the warning, sailed fifty miles to the southward, and anchored their ships behind Blossom Shoals.

Soon afterward the ice-pack, moving before a westerly wind, caught three vessels and crushed them. Signal flags were flown, calling in all the captains for a conference. Some of them had their wives and children on board. They all agreed that they were trapped, and decided to abandon their ships; there was nothing else for them to do. They lowered their 26-ft. whaleboats over the side, and more than 1,200 men, women, and children sailed down the coast, between the grounded ice and the shore, to Blossom Shoals—a distance of fifty miles. The captains who had taken the advice of the Eskimos gave up their cabins to the women and children, divided up the castaways among the seven ships, and sailed to Honolulu.

There were no lives lost in this instance; the vessels were caught near shore. But in 1876, thirteen ships were lost in the same general area. Several crew members perished from exposure; others died in the attempt to get to shore over the rough ice. Still others stayed by their ships, hoping the ice would be broken up by a gale and their ships would be released; they were never heard from again.

ancient couple Napier had been cultivating. They were outcasts for having broken some taboo of the tribe, and their lodge was several miles north of the main Dogrib village. They had been exceedingly appreciative of Napier's attentions and gifts, and he felt safe about leaving Sallybrook with them.

Sallybrook put up a big fight about being left with them, but he was weakening from that wound and the exposure, and subsided once Napier got him inside, finally falling into a heavy sleep.

The days that followed were full of grueling routine for the Inspector. He continued to string his traplines and expand his contact with the Indians. There was much excitement over the appearance of white foxes this far south, and the possession of a white pelt or two was entree into any camp. The Indians would give a dozen marten pelts for one fox fur, with plenty of talk in the trade. He soon found out the tribes were saving their pelts rather than turning them into the Hudson's Bay Post at Fort Chipewyan. They could get more, they said, from the traveling factor who paid them in Treaty Money instead of trade goods. When this man would appear, none seemed to know, or where. But Napier was sensitive to a growing tension in the country, and knew it would be soon.

He tried to see Sallybrook every day, but once in a while was drawn so far away from the lodge there on the river that he was gone two or three days. After one of these longer intervals he returned to find the old man not in his accustomed place by the fire. He asked the woman where he had gone and she mentioned the village in a vague way. The wound had been apaprently healing nicely. Napier moved over to talk with the sergeant where he lay in his bed of robes, with no intent of examination. But there was a ruddy glow to Sallybrook's face that made him feel the man's cheek.

"You've got fever," he said, startled by its heat.

"It's hot in here, that's all," growled Sallybrook.

"Teotenny! It came from the woman, over by the great brass trade kettle spitted above the fire. It meant white man, in their language, and the tone of the word held a dark, whispered portent that wheeled Napier to her. He saw the troubled darkness of her eyes, in a face of seams and furrows, and he moved over to her.

"I thought he was getting well but the wound is infected," she murmured. "He will not admit it but he is growing very weak. I put a new poultice of black root on it. I don't know if that will even draw the swelling out."

"Don't listen to that old squaw,' called Sallybrook from the corner. "Shell have you burying me tonight . . . "

He trailed off at the Indian giddes started their canine chorus outside, and Napier's own dogs joined in. The old man entered to this insane babble, stamping the snow off. He nodded greeting to Napier, speaking to the old woman.

"I did well at the village. A man is there paying Treaty Money for pelts. I got five dollars for our white fox."

IT jolted Napier like a physical shock. Trying to hide the reaction, he heard Sallybrook's violent movement behind, and turned to see the sergeant halfway out of his robes already. An eager light filled the man's eyes and his mouth was open to say something. Then his eyes passed to the Indian and he closed his mouth sharply. He did not sink back, however. His glance fell back to Napier.

"I'm going," he said, trying to get up. "I'm going with you."

"You're too sick," Napier told him, and moved swiftly to stop the man.

"No—" Sallybrook was on his feet, struggling with Napier—"we've got to do it now, Napier, this is our chance. Forget about me, will you, I'm all right. I'm going with you."

There was just enough strength in the sergeant to carry Napier backward, gasping at him. "Damn you, Sallybrook, don't be a fool, it would kill you."

"I haven't got no soft spot, I'm going, I'm going—"

Napier had seen that blank look in the sergeant's eyes before, and knew only one thing could stop him. It was a short blow to the button. Sallybrook raised up onto

his toes. Then he fell into Napier's arms, limp. Napier carried him back to the bed, covered him, took a last, reluctant look at that stubborn face. The two old people were staring at him, puzzled.

"Keep him here till I get back," he told them, waving a hand at Sallybrook. Then he turned on his heel and stooped through the opening, untying his sled from a tree and mushing his dogs off.

For a while, the whispered crunch of Napier's snowshoes and the hissing spit of spruce runners was the only sound. The pristine sentinels of timber fluttered by like the shadow pattern of a picket fence. Napier followed the old Indian's trail toward the village, and was so intent on what lay ahead that the furtive movement through the stunted trees on his flank startled him. He started to call to the dogs but they had already run free of this timber into a gully that lowered rapidly down a slope. Any abrupt halt in this would pile the sled up on top of the dogs unless he had hold of the tail line from behind. He dove after the bobbing strip of babiche, meaning to grab it before shouting the order.

This took him right into the upper end of the gully. Bent over as he was, reaching for that tail line, the drifts piled up on either lip of the cut were several feet above him. He only had a dim impression of violent movement up there, and had turned part-way toward it when the man came plunging down on him. It was the Indian they had met down on the Athabaska when their canoe sliced itself open on the rock, and in his hand was the wicked, crooked-bladed *bess-hath* that gave him his name.

Napier could do nothing but throw himself forward, twisting on around to try and block knife with an upflung arm. That succeeded in deflecting the blade into the deep fur fringing the hood of Napier's parka as Crooked Knife's leap carried him right on top of the Inspector. Then both of them were rolling on down the steep gully after the yelping dogs.

Napier caught the knife arm in both hands, pinning it in against his body as they rolled. He clung to it in battered desperation as they went over and over clear down to the bottom.

Here, as they rolled to a halt on level snow, Napier came up on top. Crooked Knife tore free his arm and lunged for the guts. Napier jumped up and away, and this carried him with his back into the steep bank of the gully. All he could de here, before the Indian could rise after him, was kick the man in his face.

Crooked Knife fell back with an incoherent sound. Napier followed him over, putting his foot into that face again, with all his weight, and again, and again . . .

When it was over Napier stepped back breathing heavily. Crooked Knife's medicine bâg had been torn off and the contents spilled all down the gully. The vari-colored feathers of that war hat looked pathetic, somehow, mashed into the snow.

"That's one plume you won't put in your bonnet," muttered Napier, and turned to stumble after his dogs.

NAPIER stopped pushing his team within sight of the main village. The lodges were hardly recognizable as human habitations, so covered with snow they looked like a scattering of hummocks along the riverbank. Most of the village seemed to have gathered around a pair of sleds just free of the black timber. As he drew closer, Napier saw an Indian step from the crowd with a load of furs, and dump them into one of those sleds. The man at the lazy-board of the sled bent to sort through the pelts. Napier was close enough to hear his voice now.

"Blue lynx. A hundred. White fox. Fifty . . ."

The muttering started among the Indians as soon as Napier halted his sled, but it did not reach the man sorting the furs till he had straightened and pulled a sheaf of bills from his pocked to pay the Indian. By that time Napier was in the front ranks with his Winchester.

"I'll take that money, Portage," he said. "In the name of the Royal Police."

For a moment Portage Marquette stood there with an inane leer on his face, making vague, childish gestures with his hands. Then he made a sound. It was hard to tell whether it was a chuckle or a burp.

"So you *are* with the Poleez?"

"I am," said Napier. "Did Crooked Knife find that out for you down on the Athabaska?"

A bestial suspicion drew Portage's little eyes together. "Crooked Knife?"

"You've got the idea," said Napier. "I met him out on the trail. Only he wasn't quite as successful this time as he was with Corporal Richardson."

"Corporal—" that fatuous wave of the hand—"Richardson?"

"You know who I mean," Napier told him.

"Hein?" The man grinned. "Maybe I do. Maybe he was the one who come all dress up in his red coat hunting for the counterfeits. How foolish to come all dress up in his red coat. He didn't get half as far as you. I had the puzzle about you. I almost let it go too long, didn't I?"

"No almost about it."

"You are so confident," grinned Portage. Then he lifted his voice, speaking in Chipewyan for the restless Indians. "Did you hear this *teotenny*. He meet one of your brothers down the trail. *Bess Hath*, he meet. They have fighting. Now where is *Bess Hath*. Kill, maybe?" The muttering grew louder among the Indians and one buck called out something hoarsely. Portage wiggled his head from side to side, grinning at Napier more broadly. "What if I don't believe you are Poleez, M'ssieu? What if I ask for your proof? The red coat, maybe."

"You'll see plenty of them at Edmonton. Drop that money in the snow, Marquette, and step back. Then we'll go to where you've got the printing press."

"No red coat?" That guttural chuckle again belched from the swinish lips. Portage cocked his head to one side. "Something else to prove. A commission, perhap."

Napier did not answer, staring at the man, seeing the sly intent growing in his black eyes. That sullen, ever expanding sound and movement from the Indians made Napier realize what that intent was. He hadn't thought it would come from them, somehow. He had thought of them as a passive, neutral factor.

"No commission?" Portage tipped his head back the other way, his grin spreading. "It would be no matter. These Dogrib cannot read. How foolish of you to do this with no proof of Poleez."

"Listen, Marquette—"

"You hear what this man say?" Portage had turned to the Indians, raising that sheaf of Treaty Money. "He kill your brother along the trail and come here with the gun for your money. Poleez, he say. Make him prove."

SOMEONE plucked at Napier's parka and he whirled involuntarily. The buck cringed back from the gun but there was more than fear in his face, there was a puzzled, growing anger, a hatred. And Napier could hear the words now. *Teotenny*. How scornful they could make it. Or *Taislini*. "Devil," to them had infinitely more odium than its English equivalent. Or *Nezonilly*. Or worse. There was an insidious viciousness to the sound, like the growl of a savage dog behind a closed gate, that raised the hair down the back of Napier's neck. He realized Marquette would not have to whip them up much longer. Marquette was shouting at them again.

"How could he be Poleez? Poleez work for the government. The government she give you this money. She wouldn't send a man out to take him away again. This is your money, and he's trying to take him from you. How could I pay you for the fur, then? He tries to take your living? You starve? Are you going let him? One man, with a little popgun, just one man . . . "

The restraint broke with an inundating babble of voices. A buck hooked one of Napier's arms from behind. He tried to whirl free. Someone tripped him. His face went into the harsh surface of a parka. He had his gun against a body, but he knew a terrible reluctance to shoot. Then even the weapon was gone. His arms were pinioned from behind. A kick in the groin brought a sick retching nausea. Then a commanding voice was speaking to Portage in Chipewyan.

"What shall we do, *Tingisuethli?*" That one word revealed the influence Portage had with them, and how he must have gained that influence. It meant white-man-who-has-turned-Indian.

"What do you do with your own *nezonilly*—" asked Portage—"your own evil ones?"

"The land takes care of its own," answered the chief. "If Chutsain sent him, Chutsain will take him back."

By the time the import of that reached Napier they had his parka off and were tearing at his leggins. They were screaming and yelling like a pack of animals, now, filled with the conviction that their most hereditary, inalienable rights had been violated. Napier had a last impression of Portage's greasy, leering face as the man turned to mush his dogs. Then that was gone, and they were lifting the Inspector's nude, struggling body into the cariole of another sled, getting out whangs of rawhide to lash him in.

"Shut up, shut up, you filthy maggot-eaters, before I bring the whole Royal Force down on your heads!"

The shout came from somewhere far off. Napier did not understand at first. All the other screaming and yelling ebbed from around him in a dying tide. His body was no longer torn from side to side in that constant battering motion. He heard the strained breath come in through cut lips. Vision returned slowly. Finally he saw.

Sergeant George Sallybrook, at the edge of the village, in the proud, scarlet tunic of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, so sick and feverish he could hardly stand erect, holding the mob of them with the sight of the crimson coat that superseded their aboriginal gods in their respect and awe.

"Now untie him and get him out of that cariole," Sallybrook said, swaying like a drunk with his fever. "And give me that gun."

By the time they had lifted Napier out of the sled the chief himself had picked up the Winchester and carried it over to Sallybrook. Napier groped around for his clothes as the sergeant started his precarious trip to the sled. Something inane and obvious always came out at a time like that. Napier heard the words babble from him on silly laughter.

"They were going to tie me in and take me out on the barrens naked."

"You wouldn't have lasted long," offered the sergeant.

"I guess I should be grateful you're so damn stubborn."

"Gratitude's for old squaws. How did you get in this mess?"

"Portage Marquette," said Napier. He had his leggins on now and some lucidity had returned. "Must have had a lot of influence with them. Whipped them up to this when I couldn't prove I was a policeman. He's got about ten minutes start on us."

"You know where he's going?"

The sergeant's voice held a quiet portent, and Napier met his eyes for the first time. "I think so."

"You got the guts to do it?"

"I'm going after him, Sergeant," said Napier. "Can you make it back to the lodge?"

"No," said Sallybrook. "Couldn't walk another step." The cariole creaked shrilly with his weight dropping over its side, and then his voice drowned that. "Now, by God, if you don't take me I'll strip off this red tunic and then let them finish what they started."

VI

NAPIER did not feel the outside things too much. His perceptions were still too dazed from the beating for that. He knew he ran, and rode the runners when he could no longer run. He knew a wind had sprung up, and had a mournful sound through the timber.

But mostly it was the inside things. It was the poignant, twisted pain somewhere in the spirit of him, running toward something he should have run away from, killing something, step by step, which he had tried to keep alive all these years since Big Quill Lake.

The Indians were gathered around the door of Dumaine's post when Napier pulled up. He got the Winchester and shoved his way through their stench. He went through the open door shoving a shell into the magazine with a snap of the finger lever. The place had a cyclonic look. Furniture overturned and trophies down off the wall. A trap door was open in

the kitchen floor. The stairs led to a basement dug out of the earth. He wasted no time here, going outside again.

"They left the printing press in the basement," he said. It looks like they've gone tripping with their pelts."

They left the chattering bunch of Dog-ribs behind and picked up the trail of three heavily laden sleds heading west-ward. The wind was rising and picked up the snow that sputtered from beneath the runners to lift it in great powdery plumes behind. Napier tried to spare the dogs by running again. Each breath he took was like a cold knife blade cutting out his lungs. But that wasn't the greatest pain. Charlotte was the greatest pain. Because he still didn't know, he still didn't know . . .

"They're on that glare ice ahead." It was Sallybrook's voice. Napier squinted his eyes to make out the three sleds cross-ing a broad expanse of ice-covered river swept bare and shiny as a mirror by the wind He put the dogs into a slide down the bank and the sled ran onto ice with a clattering, banging sound.

The wind caught it like a sail, whipping the stern around. Napier grabbed for the tail line trying to straighten it. But he slid on the ice and went off his feet. The rest of it was madness. The wind was rapidly becoming a gale, and if he let go that tail line, the sled would be blown right over. Yet he could not get onto his feet without letting go. For a long stretch, sliding, rolling, battering across that ice, he fought to regain his snowshoes without relinquishing his grip. But it was no use. The sled was going like an ice-boat with that wind on its quarter, and the dogs had all they could do to keep ahead of it.

Napier could see the three sleds ahead were caught up in the same thing. The lead outfit had already overturned, and the driver had thrown himself free to slide across the ice into the slush of the river-bank. Napier caught the ruddy flash of Portage's grizzly pelt coat as he regained his feet. Then the other two outfits were crashing into the first one with a crackle of spruce and a yelping of dogs.

Napier lost the rest of it as his own outfit went into the bank. He made one last wild effort to keep the sled from going over and dumping Sallybrook.

But the wind came up from beneath and dumped the sergeant out on his belly. From the bank, Portage was already firing at them. Sallybrook had the Winchester in his hands, and he struck the ice in a perfect prone position—legs spreadled, elbows cocked beneath the gun. All he had to do was let himself swing around toward Portage in his slide across the ice, and fire as his gun-muzzle crossed the target. It only took that one shot.

Dazed by his own crash into the snow-bank, Napier wobbled to his feet and started fighting through the slush. The other two drivers had already abandoned their outfits and were on the bank above, disappearing into timber. Napier stooped as he passed Portage's body to pick up his rifle. The man was lying on his belly and moaning, with his blood staining the snow beneath him.

The gun was an old Krag-Jorgenson. Automatically, as he ran on, Napier pulled the bolt back to see if there was a live shell left. Fresh brass glittered at him, and he plunged into the timber listening for them ahead. When he heard the soft pump of their snowshoes, he called out.

"Guillaume, stop now. I don't want to start shooting. For Charlotte's sake, don't start shooting—"

His answer was the crack of a gun. The bullet ricocheted off a spruce behind him. He dodged on through the trees. Then, abruptly, he broke from the timber with the gully below. They must have met it as unexpectedly, and plunged down into the depression before realizing how exposed it left them. Guillaume was al-ready half turned back toward Napier, his gun coming up. Napier threw himself forward onto his belly in the same position Sallybrook had fired from back there on the river. It was the most accurate way. And Napier did not want to kill.

Guillaume's bullet puffed snow off the ground a foot to Napier's left. Napier's bullet caught Dumaine in the shoulder and spun him around and dropped him heavily against the steep opposite bank of the gully.

Charlotte stared widely at her father for an instant. Then all the sand seemed to go out of her. "Vic," she gasped, weakly, turning toward him, and sinking to her knees, "Vic, oh, thank God, thank God. You *were* with the police. I didn't know. I wasn't sure. I was so afraid you weren't."

HE had reached her now, caught her elbows, lifting her up. "What are you trying to say, Charlotte?"

"Don't you know, yet, Vic?" she said. "Didn't you understand back there at the post?"

"You weren't very clear."

"How could I be with dad in the next room. I thought you understood."

"What? Understood what?"

"You don't know how hard it's been." Her face was against his chest. "All these years, Vic. I tried to stop him so many times. He got brutal toward the last. How could I do anything else, Vic? My own father. How many times I wished for your help. Your strength."

"You mean he was forcing you in on this?"

The shocked look to her widening eyes excluded any other possibility. "Vic," she said, clinging to him, "You're the only one who can understand. The rest wouldn't. Your partner's a policeman, isn't he? You know what he'd think. It *can* be Peace River now, Vic. I'll wait for you there."

"Will you, Charlotte?"

"You know I will." The throaty seduction filled her voice, and she started lifting her face to him that way. He let her do it, because it was the only way he could tell, really. When she finally pulled her lips away from the kiss, his eyes had that hooded look.

"You can't take all the sleds back with you," she said huskily. "I'll go on about a mile. Then, when you've left, I'll come back for one. With good weather, I can make Peace River. You know me in the woods, Vic."

"You're not going to Peace River. You're coming back with us."

It escaped her on a whisper. "What?"

MOUTH-TALK

The language of the Eskimos, from Greenland to the mouth of the Yukon, and from Greenland to Labrador, is almost identical. A Greenland Eskimo has little difficulty in talking with a Point Barrow native; but between the mouth of the Yukon and the mouth of the Kuskokwim there is a marked difference in the language.

"You're in this just as deep as your father and you know it?" he said. "As deep as you were back on Big Quill Lake. You didn't love me then anymore than you do now."

"Vic, no—"

"I guess I really should have known when you kissed me back at your father's post," he went on, heavily. "There was something wrong. It didn't do what it used to. Subconsciously, I guess, I did know. But consciously I was still hanging on to a dream I'd had for seven years. I had to have it this way again to really know, Charlotte. Now I know I've been trying to keep something alive that wasn't even there. Something that happened to a kid back on Big Quill. You can't do it that way again, Charlotte."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Sergeant Sallybrook. Napier wheeled to see him sitting up on the lip of the gully with the Winchester in his lap, a weak, feverish grin on his face. "I was afraid she'd find that soft spot in you, Napier. I thought maybe that streak of fat was still there. But I guess the trail's worn it off you. You're all nails now."

"You've got a lot of gravel in your own craw," said Napier. "Think you can last a few more miles?"

"Clear to Edmonton," grinned Sallybrook. "This wound ain't as bad as that old squaw would have you think."

"The wound's as bad as we think," smiled Napier. "You're just tougher than we think. I'll be proud to turn in this report with you, Sallybrook."

"I never returned a compliment before," the man grunted. "But I'll take my coat off to you and C. I. B. any day."

Tragedy At Cape Sabine

By BURT M. McCONNELL

A stark tale of terror, starvation, insanity and death . . . all of which befell the luckless Lady Franklin Bay Expedition in its invasion of the Arctic sixty-eight years ago.

ONLY SIX came back—six out of twenty-five. Yet in all the history of Arctic exploration there never had been an expedition that went forth with better equipment, higher aims and greater expectations of success than the Lady Franklin Bay expedition of 1881. In those days, before the automobile, the radio, and the airplane; when the Indians of the western plains were still on the warpath, a man who would voluntarily cut himself off from friends, family, and the comforts of civilization to serve on an outpost a thousand miles beyond the Arctic Circle, was a hero. It was as if he were going to explore another world.

The expedition consisted of two Eskimo hunters, three U.S. Army officers, a surgeon, and nineteen enlisted men. In collaboration with ten other nations, the United states had agreed to provide a meteorological station.

They arrived at their base on the east coast of Grinnell Land in August, 1881. On the way they established a chain of food caches to cover a possible retreat. They made their observations during the next two years with such precision as to call forth the admiration of the entire scientific world. They planted the Stars and Stripes in Latitude 83° 24' N., thus wresting from Great Britain the "farthest north" record which that country had held for nearly three hundred years. The total mileage of their sledging parties equalled the distance across the entire United States. They reached the Arctic Ocean by crossing Grinnell Land.

The leader of the expedition was Lieut. A. W. Greely. During those two years neither he nor any of his officers and men suffered illness of any kind. His orders from the Chief Signal Officer directed him to abandon the base, Fort Conger, at the end of two years; and to retreat southward along the coast if by that time a relief vessel had not reached his base. Greely and his party left early in August, 1883, sailing southward with a small steam launch and three whale-boats, carrying supplies for about 60 days. If he did not intercept the relief ship, Greely planned to continue to Littleton Island, across the channel near the Greenland coast and some 250 miles from Fort Conger. Twenty-three miles to the westward of Littleton Island lay Cape Sabine.

On their first day of travel over the ice of Kennedy Channel the party encountered a southerly gale. This had the effect of consolidating the ice fields, building up pressure ridges, and making it altogether impossible to use the boats. But this was merely the beginning. Throughout the voyage of 250 miles (as the crow flies) they were to encounter blinding spray, terrific gales, rain, sleet, hail, and snow; darkness, hunger, and cold; and drifting ice floes which on several occasions almost crushed their boats.

They were to experience the exhausting labor of dragging these heavy wooden craft, with their supplies, equipment, and scientific records, over the rough ice. They expected all this; it was part of the day's work. They did not, however, expect to spend the winter on a barren, wind-swept promontory—a winter of hardship and horror; of insufficient food and clothing, in cramped quarters, without the warmth of a fire or even the light of a kerosene lamp. They did not expect to be called upon to face scurvy, starvation, insanity, and death.

During the first week of travel, the party made progress at the rate of 8½ miles a day. En route they picked up caches of food that had been laid down

The food thief rated no grave. He was left where the party's bullets felled him.

two years before. By August 27th they had reached a point about 200 miles to the southward but had covered some four hundred miles to get there, dodging in and out among the ice fields. They were, in fact, within fifty miles of Cape Sabine. Had they been able to proceed a mile farther, the story of the Cape Sabine tragedy need not have been written. For a mile beyond their camp lay open water.

Exhausted by their march over the hummocks, they made camp. When morning came, they were completely hemmed in by ice fields. The boats were firmly frozen in the floe. Winter had set in extraordinarily early; they were beset. Their provisions were dwindling rapidly, despite the efforts of the Eskimo hunters to procure seals. They were fortunate, however, in finding, on a small paleocrystic floe, a pool of fresh water. This enabled them to economize on fuel; they need no longer melt ice for cooking and drinking purposes.

THE ice field was constantly in motion, under the influence of winds, tides, and currents. It was covered by a carpet of snow 20 inches deep. Unable to proceed by boat, they abandoned the steam launch and another boat, and used some of the material to build sledges to transport the two whaleboats. For they might need them when they came to the edge of the ice field.

Hacking their way over the rough ice, dumping one load and going back for another, knowing that the party might be separated at any time by a crack in the ice field, they were able to travel between a fifth of a mile and two miles a day. This required twelve hours of the most exhausting labor. Their position was precarious in the extreme; they did not know at what moment the ice might crumble beneath their feet. The short, dark days of winter were fast approaching. Numerous snow storms halted their progress.

A violent gale drove them farther out into the channel in three hours than they had been able to travel in three days. In spite of the direction and velocity of the wind, the drift was steadily southward, so that it would have been foolhardy to have tried to reach the Greenland coast. Their recent experience had proved that they could not average more than two miles a day; for every gain of two miles to the eastward they would drift four miles to the south.

Then, too, new ice was constantly forming. This was strong enough to impede the passage of the two whale-boats, and sharp enough to rip open their sides, but it was not thick enough to bear a man's weight. Moreover, the tides were strong, rising and falling from ten to twelve feet every six hours, and twisting the ice field in all directions. A retreat to Greenland, therefore, was out of the question, although Greely knew that food, clothing, and shelter awaited him there.

On September 15th they took an observation, and found that they had lost 15 miles in drifting northward before a gale. But this bad news was partially offset by the killing of a large seal. A few days later, when they were within three miles of land, they were driven back into the middle of Kane Sea by a southwest gale. Thus they were tossed about, at the mercy of the elements, twenty miles from the nearest land. The pack was in motion—grinding, crumbling, and piling up pressure ridges to halt their progress.

Then a northeast gale sprang up, driving them down the coast, past Cape Sabine, where they had hoped to land. The plan of retreat along the Ellesmere Land coast ended at Cape Sabine; likewise the line of food caches. The outlook was dismal indeed. To add to their difficulties, their floe began to break up, and they were obliged to move quickly to another. Providentially, this floe drifted against a grounded iceberg and lodged there. Seizing the opportunity, Greely and his men launched their boat, and in seven trips landed everything and everybody on a substantial floe a mile in width.

They camped for the night, four miles from land, and the following day reached a point south of Cape Sabine.

They had traveled more than 400 miles in seven weeks. They had calmly faced every danger, endured cheerfully every hardship. Greely landed, not only with every man in good health, but with the party's scientific records, instruments, and

provisions intact, and discipline unimpaired.

Greely's first task, of course, was to select winter quarters. The site was chosen, and operations were well under way when a sergeant, who had been sent on a scouting trip, returned with the disheartening news that the relief vessel had been crushed by the ice and sunk! There was, however, a food depot in the vicinity, with enough provisions, under normal circumstances, for 40 days.

The party was now thrown upon its own resources in a land practically barren of game. The men were worn out in the struggle to reach Cape Sabine. They had no shelter except their whale-boat sails, and the boat itself. There were no trees for log cabins, or driftwood for fuel. Twenty-three miles to the eastward lay Littleton Island with its caches of food—but it might as well have been a thousand.

The cold, sharp winds of early October ripped through their inadequate clothing. The shelter they were able to put up near the site of the food cache at Cape Sabine, using the sails and the whaleboat and snow-blocks and rocks, was only four feet high; the only place where a man could stand erect was under the whaleboat. Cold, dampness, darkness, and hunger were their daily portion. For Greely immediately put them on rations that, in the opinion of the surgeon were inadequate to sustain life. And there was no prospect that a ship would be able to batter her way through the ice fields before May. It was now November.

Lacking reindeer moss to insulate their sleeping bags from the ground, these coverings and the sheet of canvas under them soon froze to the soil. The roof and walls quickly gathered hoar-frost. One of the men made a sheet-iron stove from boat sheathing, and they broke up the whaleboat for fuel. The additional food that they were able to gather between November 1st and June 22 of the following year (1884) consisted of four seals, one small polar bear, two dozen foxes, about 75 dovekies and ptarmigan, more than a ton of shrimps (the proper name is sea louse, and they are about half as big as a fly), 85 pounds of sea weed, and considerable quantities of saxifrage and lichens. The entrails of the animals and winged creatures were not allowed to go to waste.

Thanksgiving was celebrated by adding boiled rice and raisins to their usual rations. The chief topic of conversation was food, and the good things they would have to eat when they got back to the United States.

But only six came back to enjoy these viands.

ONE volunteer, on a mission to bring meat from a British cache, froze both hands and feet. His companions abandoned the meat and brought him back to camp. On a subsequent trip, others were unable to locate the meat, but the leader of the party died of exhaustion and exposure.

For weeks Elison, the victim of frostbite, suffered excruciating pain in his hands and feet. Eventually the members sloughed off, one by one, without the patient being aware of the condition of his feet; all he knew was that the "soles" itched terribly. In order that he might not feel completely helpless, Elison's comrades strapped a spoon to the stump of one arm and a fork to the other.

Early in January the supply sergeant, Brainard, reported to Lieut. Greely the theft of some hard-bread from the commissary. This was a staggering blow to

WEIGH THOSE ANCHORS

Steam was first used in the Arctic in 1829, when Sir Felix Booth, an advocate of Arctic exploration, fitted out the Victory *with steam boilers and put the vessel in charge of Capt. John Ross. On October 7th of that year the expedition went into winter quarters at what is now known as Felix Harbor, in the general vicinity of the North Magnetic Pole, and were frozen in there until September, 1830. They managed to free the vessel, but were able to make only three miles before they were again beset. They remained in the ice until August, 1831, when they got under way again. This time they did better than the year before: They made four miles before winter caught up with them once more. So their net gain was seven miles in two years.*

the morale of the camp. Threats of a lynching were freely made. A number of the men pleaded with the thief to come forward and acknowledge his guilt like a man; they offered to share their rations with him if only he would play fair. The offers were in vain.

No matter how meticulous the cooks were in dividing the rations they would occasionally be accused of showing partiality to some members of the party; or of taking extra portions for themselves. This, better than any other occurrence, indicates how ravenous and irritable the men had become. One would weigh a plate of stew, unconsciously, as he passed it along the line, mentally comparing its weight with that of his own.

By the time Jaunary came they began to question the good intentions of the Lieutenant of Cavalry who had been entrusted with the task of rescuing the Greely survivors in 1883. His ship had been crushed in the ice and now lay at the bottom of the channel. This man, E. A. Garlington, had deposited 250 rations at Cape Sabine; together with a note promising that "everything within the power of man" would be done to bring the Greely party back to the United States. On the strength of the promise of a fellow-officer, Lieut. Greely continued to hold out the hope of rescue—publicly, at least. At no time after reaching Cape Sabine could the party have crossed to Littleton Island; although it would have been possible for men stationed there, and in full possession of their health and strength, to make the 23-mile trip to Cape Sabine by dogteam or whale-boat. But Lieut. Garlington was not at Littleton Island; he was in the United States, snug and warm and well-fed, trying to explain his reasons, if any, for leaving the Arctic six weeks before the fall freeze-up.

About the middle of January, Sergeant Cross, who had developed marked signs of scurvy died. They could not spare wood for a coffin or ammunition for a military salute, so the body was wrapped in a gunny sack. Lieut. Greely read the burial service in the hut, while the men remained in their sleeping bags—out of the wind, at least. Then the body of Cross, covered with the American flag, was drawn on the small sledge across the nearby lake and up the gentle incline to the grave.

By the first of March the ice had drifted out of the strait, and it would have been possible to cross in an open boat. But the party did not have the strength to take down the inverted whale-boat that had provided their shelter, and carry it down to the open water. The beginning of the end was at hand. Weeks before their stock of tobacco had disappeared, and they had resorted to smoking tea leaves and other substitutes; one of the Eskimos drove the others nearly crazy by smoking old rags.

Since the previous August they had not had a bath, a haircut, or a change of clothing. Now, early in March, each man crawled on his hands and knees to the foot of his sleeping-bag, and held their heads in the alley. The "barber" passed along the line, with a huge pair of shears, and snipped off a few handfuls of hair from the head of each "customer."

Death was a frequent visitor in the weeks that followed; it claimed the two Eskimo hunters, the surgeon, one of the officers and two of the sergeants. There had been many quarrels between the surgeon and some of the enlisted men; between the officers and the surgeon. These had worried Greely for he never could tell how they would end or what violence the wretched men might be tempted to commit. For, in the circumstances, death was preferable to life. The knowledge that the thief remained at large was a severe strain on the commanding officer.

In fact, it was not until a piece of bacon was stolen that the traitor of the party was discovered; his enfeebled stomach was unable to retain the greasy mess, and there in plain view of his comrades, Private Henry disgorged it. Lieut. Greely thereupon wrote an order of execution and detailed three members of the party to act as a firing squad. Henry's body was left lying where it fell.

By this time there was absolutely no food in the camp, and the survivors were obliged to eat their sealskin clothing and sleeping bags. Mental derangement showed itself in one officer and one enlisted man. It seemed to Greely himself that his end

was near, and he gave Sergeant Brainard directions for the disposition of his effects in the event of his death. They all staggered as they walked. Deaths were so frequent that they ceased to arouse the emotions of the survivors. After Linn's death, for example, Rice and Ralston slept soundly in the same bag with the corpse. It was all eight of them could do to haul the body of Linn to the spot now called "Cemetery Ridge." After that they merely laid the bodies in the tidal crack; their strength was gone.

Their position grew more horrible day by day. No man knew when death was coming. Each one, as death marked him for its own, became unstable mentally; his mind wandered, and he talked of home, father, mother, or wife. The death of Sergeant Gardiner was quite pathetic: For hours, before he became unconscious he held a portrait of his wife and his mother, gazing fondly on their faces. And even after his spirit had passed into another world, the skeleton fingers still clutched the picture of those he had loved.

By morning of the 22nd of June, eighteen had perished. For two days the seven survivors had had nothing to eat. The end was near.

But help was speeding to them in their extremity in the person of Commander Winfield S. Schley of the U. S. Navy. There would be no more abortive attempts by cavalry officers or private secretaries. The first relief party had sailed in 1882, under the command of William M. Beebe, Jr., the Chief Signal Officer's private secretary. Beebe made a depot of 250 rations at Cape Sabine; and a similar cache at Littleton Island. Apparently having a healthy respect for the ice movements in the Greenland area, Mr. Beebe departed on Sept. 5th. The food he left at Cape Sabine was enough to last the Greely party ten days! In fact these were the only rations, out of 50,000 sent into the Arctic in 1882 and 1883, that were of any use to Greely.

The second relief expedition was commanded by Lieut. E. A. Garlington U. S. A., in the *Proteus;* and Commander Frank Wildes, U. S. N., in the *Yantic.* Lieut. Garlington's instructions read, in part: ". . . .The *Yantic* will accompany you as far as Littleton Island, rendering such aid as may become necessary . . . ." Strictly interpreted, this meant that the two ships were to proceed together. Instead, the *Proteus* arrived in the Arctic almost a week ahead of the Navy vessel. Commander Wildes, in fact, did not see Lieut. Garlington after their departure in July until Sept. 2nd. Without wireless and a little co-operation, how could Wildes "render aid" to the *Proteus?*

THAT was Garlington's first blunder; his second was in entering the drifting pack, against the advice of Capt. Pike, the ice master. The prudent thing to do was to wait until the ice broke up. Had they done that, they might have intercepted Greely near Cape Sabine. But the cavalry officer who knew nothing of ice conditions, insisted on forcing the ship into the pack. Within twenty-four hours the staunch vessel found herself in the grip of the milling floes. They crushed her oaken timbers like so many match sticks. Then the pressure slackened and the *Proteus* sank. Her watery grave—note this—was not more than six miles from Cape Sabine!

Another portion of Garlington's instructions read: "Should the *Proteus* become frozen in, you will endeavor to make contact with Lieut. Greely by taking personal charge of a party . . . equipped for sledging . . ." Lieut. Garlington did not carry out these orders. On his return to the United States, the Chief Signal Officer preferred charges against Garlington. The Secretary of War, however, refused to allow the Lieutenant to be brought to trial,

MIRROR IN THE SKY

In thme Arctic, "water-sky" is one which gives a dark reflection of open water, with perhaps some scattered ice-floes. This indicates the possibility of navigating a ship through the scattered floes. On the other hand, the reflection from unbroken snow-covered ice-fields is white, so that the sky above these fields has a whitish appearance. By studying the sky, the Arctic navigator or sledge traveler can determine what conditions he is likely to encounter ahead, and act accordingly.

asserting that he already had been exonerated by a Court of Inquiry. Such a court, incidentally, may always be depended upon to apply a coat of white-wash.

Part of the instructions to Commander Wildes read: "Should you find it imperative to leave the vicinity of Littleton Island . . . before the return of the *Proteus*, you will establish a station on shore . . ." No such station was established. Comander Wildes had enough food on board for his crew and the shipwrecked men from the *Proteus* on the trip home-and in addition enough to supply the Greely party for two years. Yet he landed no stores at Littleton Island. In any other Army or Navy than that of the United States, it is almost certain that these men would have faced a firing squad.

Great as were the derelictions of Garlington and Wildes, it remained for a Cabinet Member to seal the fate of nineteen members of the Greely party. Garlington's precipitate flight served one purpose: It brought him to St. John's Newfoundland, in ample time for a steam sealer to be dispatched to Cape Sabine and return to civilization with the entire expedition before a single life had been forfeited, and before the close of navigation. The Chief Signal Officer recommended that this be done; the Secretary brushed the recommendation aside. Garlington, it seems, had informed him that nothing could be done at that time of year; the freeze-up might come at any moment.

Two staunch steam whaling ships and a coaling vessel participated in the 1884 rescue. By heeding the advice of their ice masters, and taking advantage of every bit of open water, Commander Schley and his aides brought the *Thetis* and the *Bear* to Littleton Island on June 22nd, two weeks earlier than any whaler had reached that spot before. Finding no record of the lost explorers, they cruised over to Cape Sabine. There they found the survivors—seven of them. (Elison died before he could be brought back home.) It was 8:30 P.M. when the advance guard stepped ashore. Refreshed by warm drinks and food, the survivors were taken on board the two vessels. Their clothing, filthy and bedraggled, was cut away from their shrunken forms, and discarded. A warm bath—the first in ten months—and a suit of warm, fleecy underwear came next.

Nothing—not even time—dims the Greely party's record for scientific accomplishment. It followed instructions. Its retreat was orderly and successful. Discipline and morale were high, even under the most adverse conditions. The work they set out to do was completed in every particular, and their records and observations were amazingly accurate. They reached the "farthest north" of the period. And their scientific contributions were, on the whole, of greater value to the world than the records of all previous Arctic expeditions combined.

GLITTER—GLARE

In his book, FARTHEST NORTH, *Fridtjof Nansen cites an example of the aurora borealis seen at 79° 28' N. Lat., in the Siberian sector: "The aurora flutters over the vault of the heavens—a veil of glittering silver. It changes to yellow, then to green, and at last to red. It spreads—and contracts—in a never-ending succession of changes. Next it breaks into waving bands of shining silver, over which shoot billows of glittering rays; then the glory vanishes. Presently it shimmers in tongues of flame over the very zenith, shoots a bright ray up from the horizon, then the whole melts away in the moonlight. It is as though one could hear the sigh of a departing spirit—a light, swishing sound. Here and there are left a few waving streamers of light. They are the dust from the aurora's glistening cloak."*

In November, 1893, Nansen saw a remarkable display of the aurora in the afternoon! *"On the southwestern horizon lay the glow of the setting sun. In front of it, light clouds were swept together—like dust rising above a distant troop of cavalry. Then dark streamers of gauze seemed to stretch from the dust-cloud up over the sky, as if the sun were drawing it from every point of the compass. Above the sun-glow the streamers were dark; a little higher they were white and shining, like silver gauze. They were almost motionless, but they were northern lights, changing gradually into cloud streamers and ending in the dust-cloud over the sun. There was no doubt as to their nature."*

KING OF THE RIVER

By JOHN BEAMES

Fast-talking Lanny Boyce had fired the feud to the point where the two proud, steel-muscled loggers were flaunting their pikepoles in wild abandon, eager to settle claim to the title—King of the River.

Hack swung his peavy. Dick had no time to duck.

THE SKY was blue and the sun brilliant, but a strong wind sent choppy green waves, tipped with white, splashing against the boom so that the broad field of logs behind it could not be moved. The drive crew had to take the day off.

In a shallow bay behind a point out of the wind the boys cuffed logs for fun. Tiny Frenchy Pochon performed almost miraculous antics on a stick hardly bigger than a fence post, turning handsprings, standing on one toe and twirling like a ballet dancer.

Lanny Boyce, round-shouldered and splay-footed, wrinkled his long nose and screwed up his eyes.

"Don't see nobody challengin' him," he

sneered. "Guess he's King of the River, eh?"

His remark was intended to be heard by Hack Styles who had been King of the River for three seasons past. Hack was six feet tall and somewhat slab-sided, but his apparent awkwardness was offset by a sure sense of balance and fine muscular control.

He had a long horse face and puffy-lidded eyes. He never saw a joke, seldom smiled, and was one of those potentially dangerous men who take everything in life with the utmost seriousness.

Lanny Boyce's high, jeering voice made him wince. He picked up a pikepole, jumped on a log and pushed out across the water.

Frenchy welcomed him with a grin. "Ha, you wan' fon, eh? Let 'er rrroll, ol' timaire," he invited.

"Hop on my log," directed Hack, "Yours won't hold the both of us."

Pochon complied promptly and the log began to spin under their feet. The crew watched critically.

"Naw, the little peasoup can't ditch him," said Lanny. "He ain't got no control. Hack has the weight. See, he's got him comin' already."

Hack had at once secured complete control of the log, and set the pace and direction, stopping or reversing at will. Pochon ran and turned with the agility of a squirrel, but was doomed. When he had the little man racing at full speed, Hack suddenly sprang into the air and came down heavily on his heels, 'killing' the log. Pochon took one step too many and went head first into the water.

The crew yelled, "Riverhog."

Hack swept the shore with an arrogant glance.

Lanny Boyce sidled up to Dick Selwyn. "See the big stiff playin' King of the River," he said making circular motions with his bony hands. "Showin' off. You can dunk him."

"Don't know as I can," returned Dick, "Hack's pretty good on stuff."

"Aw, you can do it easy," coaxed Lanny. "He's stiff and you're supple as a greased snake. You go show him up, huh?"

"Well, the worst he can do is drownd me," laughed Dick. "I'll take a sag at her just for hellery."

With the springy, perfectly balanced step of the trained riverpig, he went down to the water. He had been born on the banks of a sawmill pond and had begun cuffing logs almost as soon as he could walk.

He was not as tall as Hack or quite as heavy but he was lithe as a panther. He had a round face, a snub nose, and laughter was always close to the surface in him.

He poled out to Hack. "Mind if I come on your log?" he grinned.

"Welcome to stay long's you kin," was Hack's grim reply. "Stay topside or float your hat."

Dick leaped. At the instant his feet touched the log, Hack purred it smartly with his caulks. Dick almost went right on over. For a second he teetered insecurely, running backward. Then he brought his pole down hard on the water. It gave him just resistance enough to turn on his heels.

Hack immediately killed the log and again Dick all but went in, saving himself a second time with his pole.

"Lots of stick work," commented Hack with heavy sarcasm.

For answer Dick tossed his pole shoreward. "Cuff you barehand," he challenged. "Ditch your pole or give me best."

Hack flung his pole away.

The crew were enchanted. "Cuff her, riverhog," they howled. "Barehand and dirty. Hop and hang all summer on the white spruce."

DICK sank his caulks and jerked back. The log began to revolve, sinking until it whirled in a trough, flecks of foam flying high into the air. Balancing themselves with their arms, the pair moved in unison, letting their heels go to the ankle in water before swinging forward for the next step.

Hack killed the log abruptly but Dick whirled in time to meet the reverse. Back and forth burled the log, smothered in foam. The bark shredded away under the ripping caulks until the bare wood was exposed.

Hack's extra poundage gave him a slight advantage in control, but this was offset by Dick's greater agility. Sweat began to stream down the foreheads of both men and their breathing grew labored.

Hack weakened first. He killed the log and clamped a foot on either side of it, standing with arms outspread. Dick whipped around to face him. They stood panting, eying each other warily. The log floated to the surface in a ring of tiny ripples.

The crew fell silent, this was the quintessence of log rolling. Standing as they were, if either contestant leaned even a hairsbreadth off balance he was lost. The experts on shore could gauge the significance of the subtlest motion.

Hack bent one knee ever so slightly but Dick stretched out a hand just far enough to counterbalance it. Hack eased the pressure and Dick drew in his hand.

Keeping his legs stiff, Hack began to sway from the waist but as his head passed through a narrow arc in one direction Dick's described an arc in the other. Neither dared swing more than a few inches lest the other suddenly check.

It was no longer a contest of endurance, weight or speed, but of pure nerve. But still the initiative remained with Hack.

A slight smile curved Dick's lips. "Goin' to get wet," he warned.

Hack set his lantern jaw and his prominent eyes glared. He was unable to distinguish between a joke and mockery.

His knees were quivering with the strain of holding the log steady. They stood facing each other as if carved in stone. Very cautiously Dick permitted his muscles to relax for an instant and took a deep breath.

The initiative passed to him. He bore down with one foot. Hack's muscles had stiffened past the danger point and his caulks were deep in the log. He jerked violently in an effort to recover himself.

It was what Dick had been waiting for. He spurred the log hard with a raking motion of his caulks and Hack hit the water full length.

"King of the River, King of the River, King of the River. Hoo, hoo, hoo," chanted the lumberjacks, jumping up in the air and clapping their feet together.

Dick poled the log ashore while Hack waded ignominously after him.

He took his defeat ungraciously. "If I wasn't tired ditchin' Frenchy," he growled, "you never would of done it."

"Maybe so," agreed Dick with a grin, "We'll try her again some time, eh?"

The crew discussed the contest with professional interest. There was no doubt that Dick could lay claim to the nebulous title of King of the River, if only until their next meeting, but a good many held that Hack was still the better man on stuff.

Lanny Boyce saw a golden opportunity for making mischief. He said to Hack privately, "That there Dick Selwyn thinks he's pretty big punkins. He's braggin' around that you was easy. But I know well you can dunk him."

Hack drew in his breath. "Braggin', eh? Well, let him brag. What the hell do I care?"

Lanny next made occasion to say to Dick, "Hack's plenty sore about you showin' him up. He's had swelled head lately and it gripes him plenty to be made look cheap."

"See what happens next time," he said.

BUT no opportunity occurred. The wind went down and the crew returned to working fifteen hours a day. After supper their only thought was of sleep since the push rolled them out at four every morning, Sundays included.

They sluiced the drive out of the lake into the Purple River, a stream of many rapids, swifts, and treacherously undercut banks.

They came to Cookee Rapids, where the river made a U turn, and the push put his three best men, Hack, Dick and Black Sam on the ugly bend, throwing in Lanny Boyce as a makeweight.

On the first morning they winged up, laying logs diagonally with one end on shore and the other in the water. This caused the floating timber to sheer off instead of riding up the bank and gilpoking.

After this had been done things were very peaceful until about noon. The men lay on the soft moss under the spruces idly watching the logs slide by. The river

sang a deep and musical bass, and a pair of whiskeyjacks fluttered about looking for scraps and uttering loud screams and chuckles.

Lanny began to needle Hack and Dick. "I'd like fine to see you two go to it again," he said. "I don't know but what Hack would get his champeenship back."

"Shut up," growled Hack.

"If you're that damn anxious to see log ridin' go on out and cuff one down the rapids yourself," said Dick.

Lanny transferred his efforts to Black Sam. "If they'd give you a big enough log I wouldn't wonder but what you could dunk the both of 'em."

Sam was almost a giant, with startingly blue eyes framed in black hair and whiskers. He grinned lazily. "Aimin' to get me float my hat, eh? I don't cuff no logs without I have to but I'd be tickled to death to sling you in the drink."

Lanny subsided with venomous glances at all three.

"Call me if there's any trouble," said Sam, rolling over on his broad back and pulling his hat over his eyes.

But Lanny's mischief making had borne some bitter fruit. Between Dick and Hack there was now a sense of constraint, though they had been good enough friends in the past. It was most evident on the part of Hack who sat staring moodily at the ground and saying nothing. Dick let his eyes rest on the flowing water, dappled with sunlight and little ruffles of foam.

Lanny sat breaking up small sticks between fingers and twitching his long nose angrily.

"Damn them punks upriver," he said suddenly. "They gone and let her plug—ain't no logs comin'."

"Well, go on up and see what's the trouble," directed Hack.

Lanny got up unwillingly and wandered off. He had not gone far when he turned and shouted, "Here she comes, the full of the river."

That brought the three men to their feet at once, peavies in hand. A mass of timber hit the head of the rapids, piled for an instant, broke, charged down to the bend and halted with a shock that made the ground tremble. Log mounted on log, geysers of snowy foam spurted through the crevices, and an almost vertical wall built itself up in a matter of seconds.

"Well, she's set," said Sam resignedly, "I knowed it was too good to last."

They trotted out on the jam, peering down through the bubbling froth in search of the key log.

"Looks like that there homestead is holdin' her," said Hack, pointing to a huge stick.

"Hardly think it," said Dick. "One end's free. Must be a gilpoke in under. I think the real snag is over this way."

"I tell you it's the big log," said Hack. "Let me see the axe."

As the most experienced man on the rapids he was for the time being in authority. He climbed down the jam face until he stood kneedeep in water. Dick brought the axe and passed it to him.

Black Sam had gone methodically to work tearing a gap in the crest of the jam to let water through and keep it from building higher. With his huge peavy he plucked out log after log and sent them rolling down into the bed of the river, now almost dry. Lanny poked about doing nothing of much value.

Dick kept watch over Hack, blocking logs that showed a tendency to roll down on him, and Hack chopped away industriously but without producing much apparent result.

He chopped through a log and the jam quivered perilously. "Jump," yelled Dick.

Hack looked up white-faced. "I'm stuck," he said. "Try and hold her."

"Sam, Lanny," roared Dick. "She's pinched in on him."

They came running and immediately began pulling logs right and left to ease the pressure. That let through a cascade of water that drenched Hack to the skin.

Dick scrambled down beside him and probed in the rushing torrent with his peavy. "Think this is it," he grunted, "Stand by to pull out."

He got his hook on a log and heaved. Hack drew out his trapped foot and Dick gripped him and helped him to the bank. He stamped his foot a few times and announced, "It ain't broke anyway. I'll be all right in a minute."

The jam had settled a little but it still held. Dick picked up the axe and went over to the spot where he thought the key was located. Here a little search showed him a small log bent like a bow with the pressure behind it.

"Got her," he shouted to Sam and Lanny. "Watch out, she's liable to pull quick."

He had to strike only two blows. Then the little log snapped with the noise of a cannon. While the other two raced for shore, Dick danced away downstream ahead of the breaking jam. It collapsed with a roar, timbers leaping into the air and turning end for end.

No extended jam had had time to form, and the plug soon ran itself clear but it required two hours of hard work to wing up again.

Hack's leg was bruised and sore but he insisted obstinately on limping about and doing what he could to help. His mood was sullen, and he spoke to nobody.

Lanny rubbed his skinny hands gleefully. He said in Hack's ear, "That guy's certainly gettin' big feelin', ain't he? Cunnin' too. See the way he eased you into that pinch so he could come along and get his name up?"

"I could of got out by myself," growled Hack.

"Sure you could but he didn't want that. He wanted to hop in there and do the big thing."

"I didn't ask him to," said Hack. "He don't have to butt in on my business."

Lanny grinned covertly.

A little plug formed downstream. Dick went down with Lanny to break it out.

Said Lanny, "Hack's madder'n ever at you for showin' him up. First he goes and gets his foot catched like a dry land driver what never seen a jam before, and you have to go and pry him loose. Next you have to show him where the key log is because he was too dumb to see it. Say, that guy could kill you."

"IF HE thinks that, he's crazy," said Dick, "I didn't go to show him up. He was in a fix and I just went to help him. Anybody'd do that."

"Well that's the way he feels about it," said Lanny. "He ain't never forgave him for ditchin' him back there, and he's the kind of guy what would do anythin' to get even. I'd watch out for him."

"You're nuts too," said Dick.

"No, I ain't. I knowed him a long while. You ain't. He's got the meanest streak in him that guy."

Hack had once caught Lanny with his hand in the pocket of a man who was drunk, and had kicked him across the room. Hack being none too sober at the time himself, had forgotten the incident, but it was fresh in Lanny's memory.

"I say you're nuts and him too," said Dick. "I don't give a damn what he does."

Lanny made another attempt on Hack. "The way that guy's braggin'," he said, twisting his rabbitlike mouth, "claims he can ditch you any time any place, and not only that but he can trim you too."

Hack's excitable eyes widened. "He can commence any day he likes," he snarled. "But, say, you're gettin' into this pretty cheap. Are you tryin' to start a fight?"

"No, no," denied Lanny hastily, "but I thought you'd ought to know the way he's talkin'."

"Well, I don't want to hear, so keep your damn mouth shut after this."

But the poison was now deep in Hack's brooding, suspicious mind. For the three days they remained on Cookee Rapids he

DEEP BLUE

The Arctic basin is still largely unsounded, but Nansen, the Arctic author, found depths ranging between 9,840 and 12,628 feet; Peary reeled out 8,997 feet of sounding line near the North Pole without reaching bottom; Stefansson had no success with 4,546 feet of line in the area just west of Banks Land; and his aide, Storkerson, reeled out 15,366 feet without touching bottom at a point 90 miles north of Alaska.

Amundsen and Ellsworth recorded 12,300 feet at 87° 43' N. Lat., 10° 21' W. Long., and Wilkins found the Arctic Ocean to be 17,843 feet deep at 77° 45' N., 175° W. The Russian explorer, Papanin, sounded 14,038 feet near the North Pole in 1937. He believes there is a basin across the Arctic connecting the deep soundings north of Russia and his own at the North Pole with that of Wilkins some five hundred miles north-west of Pt. Barrow, Alaska.

would not even glance in Dick's direction. Dick merely shrugged his shoulders and let him alone.

The crew moved down to Hooshgoo Hill, a high cutbank. Here the river was clear of rapids but full of sharp bends and treacherous overhangs, where willow sweepers and even trees leaned far out from undercut banks.

The push posted Hack on Snag Point, well known as a bad bend, and stationed Dick above him with a caution to keep the logs running free. Danny contrived to get the bend next below Hack. Thus the men were strung out at intervals of two or three hundred yards, but the potentialities of trouble still remained strong.

The first day passed peacefully for Dick. A few little plugs formed on his bend but he broke them out quickly so that no large masses of timber drifted down on Snag Point.

Even so, Hack had a hard day. A submerged rock off the nose of the point was always fouling. He built a wing, but its chief effect was to sheer the logs off into an eddy across the stream whence they circled back and jammed at the least excuse.

He was continually busy, and now and then had to shout, "Jam Below," to bring Lanny up from downstream to assist him. Dick, being upstream, was not supposed to leave his bend unless a jam tailed back to him.

On the second day he had so little to do that he fell into a doze in the warm sunlight, and suddenly woke to find that a plug had formed and tailed back a good fifty yards.

He raced out, located the key, pried it loose, and had the whole jam in motion again in a few minutes. But he felt guilty and decided to ride the plug down and see it safely past Snag Point. However, he kept well back, so that if there was no trouble he could slip ashore unseen by Hack and make his way back to his own bend.

But as he rounded the bend just above he saw Hack out on the logs working furiously at what threatened to be a major jam. Hopping from log to log he ran down to aid.

Hack saw him coming and bawled, "Why in hell don't you keep your logs runnin'. Layin on your back sleepin' like a hog and lettin' everything plug to blazes."

"Well, I did come down to help you, didn't I?" countered Dick."

"I didn't ask for none of your help."

"You need it anyway," said Dick, throwing in his hook and beginning to break out the heap that was piling up on the nose of the point.

Tugging and swearing in blind rage, Hack stepped backward into a small hole, sinking to the waist. Hardly anything more humiliating can happen to a veteran river-pig than to fall into the water off a tight jam. Hack's eyes bulged from his head with fury. Dick turned his head away to hide his laughter.

He said nothing, and Hack hauled himself out and began to toss logs right and left with maniacal energy. The plug pulled in fifteen minutes under their joint efforts and began to drift away. The men went back to the point and stood waiting to see if it would clear itself.

HACK turned on Dick. "You was laughin' at me," he accused, "I seen you."

"Well, what could I do but laugh," returned Dick, "you fallin' into a hole no bigger'n my hat?"

"You're gettin' too smart for your boots," said Hack in a low, growling voice. "You think you're King of the River, eh? It's gettin around time I learned you a few things."

"Aw, go float your hat," answered Dick contemptuously, "You're crazy as a bedbug."

In a sudden gust of uncontrollable passion, Hack swung his peavy. Dick had no time to duck. He was struck on the side of the head and knocked into the deep water under the point. He sank under the logs and did not rise.

Hack stood for a moment, mouth open and eyes staring, and then began to run down along the bank. In a few yards he came to where the river had undercut deeply, and a thick mass of willow sweepers hung down into the water.

Finding himself unable to make progress

through the tangle of roots and branches, Hack hoisted himself up the bank to the drive path. He came face to face with Lanny Boyce.

"I come up to see did you need help," said Lanny glibly, but his eyes looked sidelong at the river.

Hack glared at him in acute suspicion. "You seen it?" he demanded.

"No, I—I don't know what you mean . . . ." stammered Lanny.

"You did see it," repeated Hack. "Then you seen too much."

He shot out his hands and fastened them on Lanny's neck. Lanny let out a choking scream.

"It's all your fault," said Hack hoarsely in his ear. "You made all this trouble. Only for you I wouldn't of hit him, but you ain't goin' to live to squeal on me."

He began to wrestle his victim through the thicket toward the river. It was hard work for Lanny fought desperately for his life. He broke away once, screaming in terror, but Hack caught him, pounded his face to a pulp, and secured another stranglehold.

They crashed through the bushes and slid down the bank in a heap. Hack let go of Lanny's throat and tried to lift him and throw him clear but Lanny clung to his legs howling for mercy.

A weak voice said, "Hey there, hey."

Dick was standing up to his knees in water, clinging to a sweeper with both hands. His wet face was pale and there was a great purple bruise across one cheek.

Hack's grip relaxed, and Lanny wriggled free and scrambled frantically up the bank.

"Give me a hand," asked Dick. "I'm stuck in the mud."

Hack stepped into the water, caught him under the arms and hauled him ashore, then hoisted him up through the bushes to the drive path.

Dick sank to the ground, coughing and spitting the water out of his lungs.

Hack bent over him, muttering incoherently. "I didn't mean . . . just got mad . . . tried to find you . . . sorry as hell . . . ."

HAVE A DRINK

The fact that salt-water ice becomes fresh after it has been exposed to the elements for a few months is one that is known to all whalers and sealers, but not to the general public—or even to some oceanographers. What happens is this: In June and July the sun melts the snow, and the surface of the ice becomes a network of lakes and pools connected by sluggish channels of snowwater. Rain furthers the melting process and the ice becomes honeycombed. The salt that was in the water when it froze seeps down through the honeycombed mass, leaving the rain- and snow-water suitable for cooking and drinking purposes. Thus it is possible for a whaler to tie up to a floe, run a line of hose to the nearest pond, and fill its tanks with fresh water.

Dick looked up at him reproachfully. "That was a dirty trick—you didn't have no call to swing a peavy on me. That poke in the mush kind of par'lyzed me. Only that I got tangled in them sweepers it'd been good night."

"Go ahead," said Hack contritely, "I'll take my medicine. I got it comin' to me . . . I guess I was crazy . . . but I swear I never went to kill you."

"Well, you was too damn hasty anyways," said Dick, sitting up. "I didn't come down river lookin' for no trouble . . . Aw, never mind, seein' you're sorry. But say, what in hell was you doin' to Lanny Boyce?"

Hack blinked. "Oh, him. Why, I thought he seen me hit you. Anyway he acted like he had. I thought if I'd killed you I might as well fix him too seein' he was the one that made all the trouble between us."

"You was goin' to croak him too?" gasped Dick. He began to laugh hysterically.

He wiped the tears from his eyes and choked.

"That's a good one," he coughed, "Say, you like to do a job right when you commence, don't you? Gad, oh my gad, if that ain't the funniest thing I ever see . . ."

Hack stared at him solemnly. "Be damned if I can see the joke," he murmured in a puzzled tone.

The outrunning coils had whipped a turn around the harpooner's body.

CAPTAIN CYCLONE

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

The whaler's fiery captain was not the man to take a beating and forget it. He would nurse his hate carefully until the poison of it slowly mounted to his brain, and nerved his hand to strike . . .

THE WHALER, *Carlotta,* had wintered at Wainwright Inlet. Captain Crighton, better known as Cyclone from Vancouver to Aklavic, had hoped to be the first of the fleet to reach Point Barrow where the Bowheads abounded. As anticipated, the pack-ice had separated itself from the shore in early June; but an unexpected nor'wester had interfered with the ordinary course of events and the pack was shifting about in sudden and dangerous movements. While the storm raged Cyclone fumed. He was as sour as vinegar when he was sober and downright dangerous when he was drunk, which was three parts of the time.

Cyclone was spectacular, as good a showman as he was a seaman. He owed his nickname to the violent manner in which his wrath made itself manifest. First he would slam his hat down on the deck, then go stamping around it with oaths pouring out of his black, bearded mouth like bilge water.

But few skippers knew the Polar seas as well as Crighton; and the *Carlotta's* crew of thirty men and officers lay snug and warm in a granite-walled cove, protected from the storm and the ice.

Below decks, Roy Laing sat in the saloon opposite to Mr. Spoul, Crighton's swarthy, sharp-eyed mate. The crew was breaking

ice forward, the thud of their sledge hammers shook the ship's timbers and rattled the glass tumblers on the long, teak table.

The heavy tread of Crighton's feet sounded on the poop deck above as he packed restlessly to and fro. Laing glanced up at the deck-head.

"If the wind doesn't shift soon," he remarked. "He'll go nuts."

"You can't blame him," said the mate with a shrug. "He's master an' owner. And with that gang for'ard eating up the profits, sitting on their blasted—"

"Did you say sitting, Mr. Spoul?" Laing interposed with a grin.

"Look, Mister!" Spoul flared. "You're just second mate aboard this ship. When you've sailed as mate as long as I have, overworking your crew will be the least of your worries!"

"Driving them won't do any good," said Laing. "It's bound to start trouble."

Spoul rose an walked over to a brass spittoon an stood rasping the bowl of his pipe with a jack-knife. His voice dropped to a confidential tone:

"I'm going to tell you something, young fellow. Since women took to using steel in their stays instead o' whale bone, whaling ain't what it used to be. A man can't pick an' choose these days. Cyclone has his faults but he's smart. He'd make money where you an' me would starve. Stick with Cyclone an' pay off with something worthwhile, that's my motto an' my advice."

"It would take a better man than me," said Laing, with a wry smile.

Spoul shrugged, "Aye, well just you keep on the right side of the ol' man. It'll do you no good to run foul o' him."

"What makes you think that I might?" asked Laing, with a quick look at the other's face.

Spoul squinted and screwed up his mouth.

"I'm not blind," said he. "I saw that kind of look in your face when Cyclone beat up that harpooner, bully Nick."

"That flogging was as brutal as it was uncalled for, Mr. Spoul," said Laing.

"Maybe," Spoul conceded. "You're a big chunk o' man, Mister, but forget what you was thinking then an' you'll finish this voyage in one piece. Now, I've warned you—"

BEFORE he could finish, the clatter of feet sounded on the companionway steps. Young Burk, the third mate, staggered into the saloon. Blood was streaming from badly cut lips. He was just a boy, making his first trip as an officer. Laing steadied him as he lurched against the table.

The youngster wiped blood from his mouth with a shaking hand and stared up into Laing's face, a dazed look in his eyes.

"He hit me, Mr. Laing!" he gasped.

"What did you do?" demanded Spoul.

"Nothing—I don't think so. It's so damn cold up there I sent the men below for a mug-up. It wasn't wrong, was it?" He appealed to Laing.

"No, it was right and considerate, Mr. Burk," Laing approved.

"Now just a minute!" Spoul began to bluster. "When I put my men to work I don't want them—"

"To freeze on deck," Laing put in quickly. "And I agree with you, Mr. Spoul."

The mate opened his mouth to speak but there were sparks of anger in Laing's blue eyes and he thought better of it.

Laing steered the boy to his cabin.

"Clean up," said he, "I'll stand your watch for you."

The youngster gave him a grateful look and spat a tooth into the wash basin. His top lip had been laid open from the nose down. Laing helped him to draw the torn flesh together with court-plaster. Then left him and went to his own cabin.

When he came back into the saloon, dressed for the deck, Spoul jumped to his feet.

"What are you thinkin' to do?" he demanded.

"The steward will have to put a few stitches in Mr. Burk's lip," said Laing, ignoring his question and moving toward the companionway.

"All right, I'll get Sam," Spoul complied. "But what are you going on deck for?"

"To finish Mr. Burk's watch."

The mate crossed over to him and caught

him by the arm, shaking it in his agitation.

"I've warned you!" he piped.

"I heard you, Mr. Spoul. I'm not looking for trouble."

"If you make any you won't get any help from me!" Spoul backed away from him, pushing at the air with the palms of his hands.

"The last man I'd call on," said Laing, with a thin smile.

On deck the sunshine was brilliant. The ice on the surrounding cliffs had thawed and then frozen again. Huge icicles hung from the crags, coruscant like pendants set with millions of diamonds. The wind had dropped to a half gale and was shifting around to the south'ard.

"Mister Laing!"

Laing turned quickly as Crighton's voice rang in his ears. The *Carlotta's* captain was standing in the lea of the deckhouse. He would have dwarfed most men when stripped, but in fur-lined sea boots, bearskin coat and hat, his bulk was enormous.

"Where's that ninny that calls himself a mate," he demanded. "Where is he, eh? It's his watch, ain't it?"

"With your permission I'll finish Mr. Burke's watch, sir. He's under the weather."

"My God!" Crighton spat contemptuously. "Does he want to go home to his mama? What kind of a man is that, Mister?"

"He's hardly a man yet, I'd say," Laing answered, failing to keep reproof out of his tone. "Just a kid."

"Keep your opinions to yourself!" growled Crighton.

"You asked for it, sir," retorted Laing.

"Blast you an' your soapy-mouthed insolence! I've just about had enough of it, Mister!"

He took his hands from his pockets, rested them on his hips, and stood glowering at Laing. His breathing was rank with rum.

Laing's eyes were level with Crighton's. He stood over six feet and he had the easy poise, the quiet assurance of the man who has been taught the value of a cool head at all times.

"You asked me a question, Captain. I answered it," he replied with exasperating patience. "You'd no cause to hit that youngster, and it's not insolence to tell you so."

Down went Cyclone's hat on the deck and he went stamping around it. A vile string of epithets brought sparks into Laing's eyes, but he watched Crighton circle his hat with a half smile on his lips. Then, stooping suddenly, he picked up the hat and handed it to Crighton.

"You'll take cold in your head, Captain."

Crighton came to a stop as if Laing had struck him. He was used to cringing obedience. Men fled before his wrath as a ship before a gale. The hat routine had always produced the desired result, the shock of its failure left him gaping at Laing, bereft of the power of speech and action.

"The wind has swung around to the south'ard, sir," remarked Laing imperturbably. "The pack should be moving seaward by morning."

"Get below, Mister!" Crighton gasped. "Tell Mr. Spoul to come on deck."

"Aye, sir!" Laing turned on his heel and started for the companionway.

II

THE BLOW took him completely by surprise. A band of light ashed before his eyes and the deck came up and slapped him in the face. But his fur ear-muffs had softened the full shock of Crighton's fist. He shook his head vigorously and clung to consciousness. He heard the crunch of Crighton's boots on the deck and rolled over in time to grab the other's leg as Crighton lifted his foot to drive an iron-shod heel into his face. He hung on desperately as Crighton dragged him across the deck, cursing and trying to jerk his leg free.

As Crighton backed up into the deckhouse and was thrown off balance, Laing got a good purchase on his heel and toe. A powerful twist and a quick heave threw Crighton on his back. Instantly Laing was on his feet.

Crighton got to his feet slowly, mouthing oaths. Laing backed away, his eyes wary.

"Better think it over, Captain," he ad-

vised, coolly. "You'll have to finish what you start."

The dazed look of incredulity that came to Crighton's face was almost comical. He obviously could not believe what he saw. He couldn't remember the last time a man had dared to stand up to him, and that after he had hit him once!

"Blast you, I'll beat you into blubber!" he roared and tried to bull Laing off his feet.

Laing was young and he was fast—so fast that his one hundred eighty pounds of brawn and muscle moved as if there were steel springs in his boots. Moreover, the pent up anger of months was boiling in his veins.

He fought coolly with a faint smile on his face, such as comes to a man's lips when he thinks of secret joys. He gave ground unhesitatingly, ducking Crighton's wild swings, side-stepping his rushes with lithe grace, but never missing a chance to land a blow.

Three times they circled the deckhouse. Then as Crighton gulped in the freezing air in painful gasps and his face turned purple, Laing attacked. His right and left fists thudded on Crighton's jaw in rapid succession. Crighton staggered back under the barrage, covering up. With the blood pounding in his ears Laing followed him, striking again and again. Cyclone collapsed at the head of the poop ladder, and subsided into a heaving, groaning mass of fur.

Laing stood over him, breathing deeply. He glanced forward. The crew was turning to after the noonday meal, tumbling up out of the scuttle hatch, urged on by the stinging profanity of the *Carlotta's* bo'sun. Bully Nick, the harpooner, was hurrying aft with a big grin on his face. Wondering how much he'd seen of the fight, Laing went down to meet him.

"I seen it all!" Nick told him gleefully. "He got wot was comin' to him today, he did!"

"Stow it!" said Laing sharply. "I won't have that kind of talk, Nick."

"All right, Mister," said the harpooner with a placating gesture. "But look, he ain't the kind to let bygones be bygones. He'll lay for you, Mister!"

"Get forward, Nick!" Laing ordered. "Just tell your mates I don't want to hear any more talk of it."

"Aye, sir!" growled Nick. He turned and started forward but after he had taken a few paces he turned again and stood considering Laing with one eye helf closed while he rubbed the red stubble on his chin with a horny hand.

"Just the same," he said at last, "keep clear o' the poop rail on dark nights, Mister!"

When Laing returned to the poop Crighton had disappeared below. He went down to the saloon. The sound of voices came to his ears from the Master's cabin. Crighton was talking; then Spoul's piping voice cut in. Laing caught a few of his words—oily salve for Crighton's chastened spirit. He listened for a moment; then went on deck, uneasy in mind not knowing what to expect next.

TOWARD the end of his watch the wind shifted fitfully, then settled in the southwest—a warm blast from the Pacific Ocean that brought the long awaited thaw with it.

On the following morning open water was visible. The pack-ice was drifting seaward. Yawning chasms opened in the age-old accumulation looking like a blue-veined design in white marble. A channel extended from Blossom Shoals and eastward to Point Belcher and Point Franklin.

The *Carlotta* was under way by noon, pushing her nose through the brashy, new ice. She was headed out for the shoals where the Bowheads came to feed on the microscopic plants and animals which, in their countless myriads, stained the shallow coastal waters green and brown.

The sturdy schooner was well equipped for her task. She was built after the strongest fashion, protected along the waterline by additional planking of Australian ironwood, strengthened inboard by beams and knees and outside by plates of iron. Her auxiliary steam engine could drive her at eight knots in open water. She carried only two whale boats; but in the bow of each was mounted a seventy-five pound harpoon-gun, capable of hurling a twelve-pound dart, with deadly force

and precision, for a distance of twenty-five yards with that part of the whale line called the "foregoer" attached.

The gale had blown itself out, leaving behind a heavy swell as an aftermath of the deep-reaching disturbance the ocean had endured. There was not enough wind to fill the *Carlotta's* sails and she chugged along with the white spume foaming and hissing over her foredeck as she plunged her nose into the green swell. Vapors rose incessantly from the sea and were wafted away in golden, snowy scrolls, while beneath them new mists arose, shrouding the bleak outline of the coast with a deceptive, luminous veil.

Just before the end of Laing's watch, Crighton came on deck. Laing paced the weather side of the poop while Crighton paced the lea. Once their measured walk brought them to the taff rail together; they turned, paused and stood face to face, each looking deeply into the other's eyes. Then, without exchanging a word, they continued their perambulations.

Crighton's face, Laing had noted during that brief pause, was badly bruised and swollen. But it was the festering wound he could not see that worried him.. As Nick had said, Crighton was not the man to take a beating and forget it. He would nurse his hate until the poison of it mounted to his brain and nerved his hand to strike—

"Ah, blo-o-o-ow!" A long drawn shout came from the crow's nest.

"Bl-o-o-ow! Bl-o-o--ow!" the shout was repeated.

"Where away?" bellowed Crighton.

"Close in on the lee beam, sir! A school —a whole pod of 'em!" the lookout reported, his voice rising with excitement.

Sure enough, about a quarter of a mile to leeward, the glistening, black humps of a pod of Bowheads showed through the shifting mist, spouting high into the air, then sounding, flukes high, in the midst of feathery spray.

The ship's bell on the fo'c'sle head began to clang, rousing all hands. Mr. Spoul came clattering up the companionway. He raced forward with his shirt tail flying behind him and shouting:

"Tumble up! Tumble up. No skulking there!"

But he was outclassed by Crighton's fluency and lung power. His piping voice was soon drowned out by the flood of abuse that came from the poop. Under the whiplash of his tongue the crew ran for the boats, always swung out and ready to lower away. The *Carlotta's* engines were stopped and she lost way quickly.

Crighton was examining the school through his binoculars. Presently he turned to Laing and growled:

"There's enough blubber there to fill us. Take the port boat, Mister, Remember, Bowheads don't sink. As soon as you get your iron into one, kill it, and go for another. Let's see if you're as good as you think you are!"

"Aye, sir!" answered Laing promptly, his eyes alight with excitement.

Quickly Laing checked the boat's equipment: the pistol handle of the harpoon-gun mounted and the gun-bollard in the bow: the six-foot lances that would give the stricken monsters their death blow: lastly, the "foregoer" coiled in a wooden tub on the port side of the gun; and the whale line itself, six hundred fathoms of the finest hemp, thirty-two yarns to the strand and as soft as silk. Bully Nick manned the gun, Laing the steering oar.

The Mate's boat was already in the water, her mast stepped and her sail drawing the wind.

"Get away, Mister!" Crighton roared at Laing. "What the hell, d'you expect the damned fish to swim over to you!"

Laing had deliberately delayed the lowering of his boat. The etiquette of whaling ruled that the mate's boat should be the first away; to him tradition gave the honor of striking the first whale.

Laing gritted his teeth and swore under his breath. He saw only too clearly what the next few months held in store for him. It was to be a war of nerves, a nightmare of fault-finding and incessant needling. The old, brutal game calculated to drive a man into some overt breach of discipline and then to break him for it.

His boat went down smartly. A few strokes of the oars got them clear of the ship and the sail was hoisted. The grace-

ful craft sped away into the swirling mist.

III

THE SCHOOL of whales was spanning in a decided direction. Since the Bowhead cannot see ahead, the two boats held a parallel course with them until they were well beyond the leader; then tacked and bore down on their quarry from ahead.

The Mate's boat was well in the lead, only her shadowy outline was visible through the vapors. Soon the flash of a harpoon-gun rent the lacy curtain and its report rolled across the sea. Spoul's voice like a faint echo, shouting orders. Laing's boat sped on.

Presently Nick pointed and said, softly:

"Blo-o-ow!"

Laing brought the boat's head around sharply. The sail was lowered and her crew bent their backs to the oars. In a moment they were within a few yards of a Bowhead bull.

"Let him have it, Nick!" Laing ordered quietly.

The boat lurched and seemed to lift clear of the water as Nick pulled the trigger. The harpoon sped true to his aim, its triangular head burying itself deep in the left shoulder of the leviathan. Up went his great flukes and then slapped down on the water with a noise like the shattering of a ton of china. Then he sounded. In a trice Nick had a turn of the whale line around the bollard behind the gun.

"Ware line!" he sang out, as the hemp began to run out.

In the shallow water the whale could not go deep. Within ten minutes he breeched, shooting up into the air with three parts of his bulk clear of the water, white belly flashing. For a terrible moment it looked as if he would crash on the boat and crush every man it in. Laing threw his weight against the steering oar.

"Stern all!" he roared. The long oars bent in a sweeping back-stroke, driving the boat clear.

The whale struck the water with a resounding smack, drenching the boat's crew with spray. Then he went into convulsions befitting his kind and strength. He raised his flukes, a blow from which would have made matchwood of the boat, and threshed the water with deafening strokes, rolling over and over at the same time until the sea was foaming.

Suddenly Nick let out a piercing yell. Glancing forward quickly, Laing saw that the whale line had slipped from the bollard, and the out-running coils had whipped a turn around the harpooner's body. Nick went over the side with an agonized shout.

"Cut it, cut it!" shouted Laing.

Obediently the bowman slashed at the line with the boat-ax. A stroke parted it.

But Nick was still foul. The rolling monster reeled in the line as if it were on a gigantic drum, dragging him under.

Laing already had his coat off. Sheath knife in hand, he went over the gunwale in a clean dive. As the great whale rolled, Nick came up on the other side. Over he came, sprawling out on the ribbed belly of the whale, gasping and struggling to free himself from the entangling rope coils. As the monster completed his roll, Laing grabbed the harpooner and went under with him, sawing at the hemp with his knife. The line parted and not a moment too soon. Freed from the galling torment of the taut line, the whale's flukes went up. He sounded and he stayed down.

Laing came up with the harpooner's rusty locks grasped in his hand. The boat shot alongside them and they were dragged out of the freezing water. Brandy from the boat's locker brought color back to Laing's blue lips. Nick was thrown over a thwart, brawny arms pumped the water out of him. He was soon recovered sufficiently to drink half the bottle of brandy.

"Th' blasted fish's clean gone, Mister," observed the bowman. "With a bran' noo iron, four hundred fathom o' line, an' all! Wait till Cyclone hears o' it!"

The harpooner picked up a whale lance and balanced it in his hand. A black scowl darkened his swarthy face.

"If he opens his trap to you, Mister—after what you done," he threatened, "Here's an iron as will—"

"Belay, Nick!" commanded Laing, sharply.

"Aye, sir!" growled Nick, and lapsed into gloomy silence.

The *Carlotta* was lost in the mist, but her horn sounded eerily—two long blasts at regular intervals, indicating that her engines were stopped. The boom of a gun marked the position of Spoul's boat. Evidently he was fast to another whale, his second. Drenched and shivering, Laing's face twisted into a grimace of disgust. With his line gone there was nothing for it but to return to the ship and take Crighton's abuse.

When they bumped alongside the *Carlotta,* Crighton came to the rail:

"What's wrong?" he demanded, as Laing swung onto the deck.

Laing told him and waited for the storm to break. But Crighton took it with surprising calm.

"Hell, I should have known what to expect," he said, coldly. "You're not worth your keep, Mister. Mr. Roul will take your boat in future. Now, get below an' stay there, for God's sake!"

Laing's face went white. He saw now that Crighton had merely changed his tactics, he was hitting where it would hurt the most. Treating him as if he were incompetent, without the shadow of a reason to justify it! Without a word he turned and walked aft.

MR. SPOUL had killed three whales. One of them floated astern at the end of a line; the other two wallowed alongside, fore and aft. The "cutting-in" process began immediately, and for the next few days the crew were up to their eyes in blubber.

Due to the shortness of the season, the blubber was not rendered aboard ship but cut into "horse-pieces" and stowed below decks. Compared with the reeking, putrid mass that came out of the *Carlotta's* holds at the end of a season the try-pots of a sperm-whaler smelled like attar of roses.

Master and officers worked out on the "cutting-stage," a platform of planks slung over the ship's side. Their keen edged spades sliced into the blubber while the winches heaved and tore great strips of oily fat from the rolling carcass of the whale, with every spar and stay groaning and protesting against the strain put upon it. As the strips came inboard the crew fell upon them, cutting them into pieces and throwing them into the hold.

Back-breaking toil it was; and it went on day and night with the gulls wheeling and screaming around the cutting-stage. Crighton drove each watch unmercifully, his temper and language the worse for lack of sleep.

The last piece of blubber stowed, the *Carlotta's* decks were scrubbed gleaming white again. Shortly after noon she spread her wings to a fresh wind and bore away for Point Barrow.

Mr. Spoul was half an hour late in making his relief early on the following morning. When he did come on deck he was bleary-eyed and stank of rum.

"Sorry, Mister," he apologized to Laing. "Been gamming with the ol' man all night."

"What's he got on his mind?" asked Laing.

The Mate gave him a sour look:

"That whale you lost, an' four hundred fathom o' line. An' that's not all," he added with a chuckle.

"Well?" Laing prompted him.

Spoul shook a crooked finger at him:

"I warned you, Mister!"

"All right, you did that, Mr. Spoul." Laing found it hard to keep the contempt out of his voice. "Let's have it, now."

"You'll find out soon enough," Spoul answered. "Thought you was gettin' away with it, didn't you? Well, you ain't got away with nothin'—nothin', Mister!"

He reeled away. Laing went below and fell asleep wondering what kind of misery Crighton had brewed up for him.

Four hours later he was awakened by a knock on his door. The steward poked his head through the door in answer to his shout.

"You're wanted on deck right away, Mister," Sam told him. "The ol' man's raising hell!" He shut the door and hurried away.

Laing dressed quickly and went on deck into brilliant sunshine. All hands were mustered aft. They stood in a compact group at the foot of the poop ladder, with their weather-beaten faces turned upward, their eyes following Crighton's burly figure as he paced the poop from rail to rail, a black scowl on his face. Spoul and

Burk stood apart. The youngster's face was as white as the mainsheet. Then Laing saw Bully Nick, and his own color changed.

The harpooner was stripped to his waist. His bound hands were stretched above his head by a rope that ran through a block attached to a stay, so that he hung there with his toes just touching the deck.

Crighton stopped in front of Laing as he took his place between Spoul and Burk.

"You lost a whale, Mister," he accused, in a voice loud enough for all to hear, "an' four hundred fathom of line."

"Aye, sir," answered Laing. "I take full responsibility for it."

"Oh, aye," commented Crighton with a sneer. "Maybe you think you should get a medal for it, Mister. But I'm passing over that. You did save his worthless life." He jerked his thumb in the direction of Bully Nick:

"What I want to know is, did that man threaten to kill me with a whale lance?"

The question was a leading one. Laing stood silent, trying to gage Crighton's drift.

"D'you deny that he made such a threat in your hearing, Mister?" asked Crighton, loudly.

"No, sir!"

"And you didn't make a report to me!" thundered Crighton. "Why?"

"I didn't take the threat seriously, Captain," Laing answered lamely.

"I've had trouble with him before an' you know it!" Crighton stormed. "Mr. Spoul tells me that you think I work the crew too hard. Maybe you think they should do something about it. Maybe you've been talking it over with them, eh?"

Laing's eyes flashed. "Show me the man who'll say that I have, Captain," he challenged.

"I'm asking you, Mister! Where do you stand? With me or with that scum forward?"

"They're good men and willing, Captain," Laing replied with stoical self-control. "But if you're hinting at trouble, I'm where I belong, with the afterguard."

Crighton stood considering him with eyes that had a puzzling gleam of triumph in them.

"All right," he said at last. "I'll take your word for it." He went to the poop rail and roared at the crew:

"Men, I'll have no mutinous talk aboard my ship. I'm going to make an example of Bully Nick. Fifty lashes is the punishment." He turned and strode back to Laing.

"Go ahead, Mister. Lay them on!"

"Me?" gasped Laing, shocked out of his calm. "It's not my place to—"

"It's your place to obey orders, Mister!" Crighton bellowed. "You heard me, lay 'em on!"

IV

THERE was a moment of tense silence. Laing felt all eyes upon him. Crighton was within his rights according to the harsh code of the sea. Further, Laing knew that he would be judged wrong for not reporting mutinous talk to his commander. He'd been long enough at sea, he thought bitterly, to know that there was always a sneak in the fo'c'sle, one who would inform against his shipmates. As matters stood, he could obey, or by not obeying, give what would be construed as proof of Crighton's charge, that he was in sympathy with the men and stirring up mutiny.

"Fifty strokes. Lively now!" Crighton's voice recalled him.

With tight-set lips Laing walked across the poop and down the ladder. Giles, the bo'son, stood with the cat stretched across his fat belly, the handle in one hand, the tails in the other. He surrendered the lash to Laing, his face expressionless. The men moved back silently to give Laing elbow room. Laing raised the cat, then, with a muttered oath, let it fall to his side again.

"Lay on, Mister." Nick's voice hissed at him. "You know what he's after, don't you?"

"Aye, Nick, I know."

"Lay 'em on then!" urged Nick. "If you don't, there's another as will, an' a lot harder I'm thinkin'!"

Laing gritted his teeth. The lash whistled and descended. Although he had pulled the stroke red stripes appeared on Nick's brawny back. Upon the fourth stroke the knotted tails drew blood and Nick winced.

With a burning oath Laing flung the cat overboard and turned blazing eyes toward the poop.

Crighton let out a roar and came down the ladder followed by Mr. Spoul. The Mate had a big colt revolver in his hand.

"Get forward!" he yelled at the astonished hands, menacing them with the gun.

"What's gripin' yer, Mister?" asked Giles in bewilderment. "We ain't done nothin'."

"No, but you're supposed to be thinking it, bo'son," Laing told him, with a bitter laugh. "You're part of the act."

"Get forward!" Spoul piped again. "I'll drop the first man as lifts a hand!"

"And that goes for you, Mister," Crighton added, with a grating laugh. "I'm accusing you of concealing mutinous acts. It'll all be entered in the official log, shipshape an' aboveboard. Got anything to say?"

Laing could feel the muzzle of Spoul's colt in the small of his back. He knew that if he moved so much as a muscle he'd be a dead man. He could see it in Crighton's half-closed eyes.

"There's a Shipping Master at Aklavic, Captain," he answered. "I'll answer your charge before him."

"A sea-lawyer, eh?" Crighton spat contemptuously. "D'you think I don't know my rights? You signed on for the season, Mister, an' we're not putting in to Aklavic."

Laing smiled, "It's only a three day run, Captain. With mutiny on your mind they'll wonder why you didn't. And if you don't make your charge stick, you'll pay me for every day you keep me in irons."

Purple veins came to stand out on Crighton's forehead, and doubt clouded his eyes.

"So that's the way *you* have it figured," he said in a thick voice. "Haul *me* up before the Shipping Master, eh? Maybe get my papers cancelled, eh?"

"That's up to you, Captain." Laing replied. "All I'm asking is to be signed off at Aklavic."

"I'll sign you off in hell, Mister!" Crighton exploded. His eyes flared and he dealt Laing a sudden blow full on the mouth.

LAING reeled back against the bulwarks. With a cry of animal ferocity Crighton hurled himself upon him. Before Laing could lift his hands to defend himself another blow felled him and he lay on the deck.

When he came to he was stretched out on canvas. There was a leg-iron just above his ankle attached to a length of chain, which in turn was shackled to a stanchion by a rusty padlock. The locker was a mere cubby-hole, a triangle formed by the angle the ship's planking made with the stem. Situated just above the water-line, it was as black as tar within, with no ventilation other than a small hatch in the deck-head that opened into a storeroom above. The air was foul with the bitter, musty odor of rotting canvas. Bilge water gurgled when the ship rolled. When Laing sat up, rats scampered to cover.

His head ached. He felt it gingerly. There was a lump on the back of it and his hair was matted with dried blood. The rough stubble on his chin indicated that he had been unconscious for several hours at least. He doubted that Crighton had hit him that hard. Perhaps, he thought, he'd hit his head on a beam when they'd heaved him into the locker.

Painfully he got to his feet. The deck was too low to allow him to stand upright. Bent double he groped his way to the hatch. It was open, just enough to let in a little air. He searched his pockets for a match but found them empty. Evidently Crighton, fearing the cupidity of the crew, had relieved him of his wallet and loose change also.

He sat down and tried to think. But one idea obsessed him. He'd never get a chance to talk to a Shipping Master anywhere. Something would happen to him, an accident. He'd seen murder in Crighton's eyes.

He lifted his head as the rattle of a chain reached his ears. Presently he heard footsteps on the deck above. A yellow shaft of light struck through the narrow opening of the hatch. It was opened.

"Below there!" came Bully Nick's hoarse whisper.

"Aye, here, Nick!" answered Laing.

In a moment the harpooner had handed

down his lantern and a bundle done up in a white napkin. Then he wormed his body down through the hatch.

"There's grub there, Mister," said Nick. "Eat it while I work on them irons." He pulled a file out of his pocket.

"What have you done, Nick?" Laing asked, in sudden alarm.

"Not much—yet," Nick chuckled. "Mr. Spoul was on watch, but he's restin' peaceful now. I had to hit him kinda hard."

"Oh, Lord," groaned Laing. "He's got us now, Nick!"

"No he ain't! Not the way Mr. Roul an' me has it figured. Look, Mister, we gotta get off this hooker—you should know that by this time!"

"Aye, I guess you're right, Nick. Who's on deck now?"

"Mr. Roul. Me an' Mr. Roul talked it over. The whale boat's ready when you are."

"Where are we?"

"Point Barrow is just about abeam. An' the weather's thick, just right for a getaway."

"Hm-m." Laing mused aloud. "We could coast along to Aklavic. Take four days, maybe a week."

"'Tain't nothin', Mister. Why, when I was castaway—"

"Save that one for your best girl, Nick," Laing interposed with a grin. "I'm a seaman, too."

They fell silent while the file rasped. At last the heated band fell from Laing's leg.

"Let's go, Nick!" said he.

"What about Cyclone, Mister?"

"I'll look after him, Nick."

"Aye, so you can!" said the harpooner with a broad grin.

The staccato strokes of the ships bell, striking two A.M. sounded as they emerged on deck. They drew back into the shadows as the helmsman, just relieved, came forward. Laughter and a bar or two of a bawdy song floated up from the hold as he opened the hatch and dived below.

"The crew's for you," Nick explained. "But Sam thought as how a little o' the Captain's rum would help to keep 'em that way."

"So, you've got Sam in on it too, eh?" Laing grinned. "You're a blasted pirate, Nick!"

"Best be on the safe side," said Nick, pointing to the hatch.

QUICKLY they battened it down, making prisoners of the rollicking crew. Then they made their way aft. A cold, dank fog hung over the sea. The *Carlotta* was hove-to, her sails hanging limp. There was not a sound but the melancholy cry of the gulls and the creak of gear chafing with the motion of the ship. Burk saw them coming and came down from the poop to meet them. His eyes were shining with excitement.

"Crighton's below," he told Laing in a tense whisper. "Good and soused!" He pushed a revolver into Laing's hand.

"Clear away the boat," said Laing. "If I'm not back in ten minutes, better come look for me."

He mounted the poop ladder. As he stepped from the shadow of the deckhouse, the helmsman turned and saw him. Laing doubled his fists and prepared to spring. But the seaman grinned and turned his head away. Laing crept down the companionway steps.

Crighton was seated at the head of the big table, snoring, his head resting on his arms. There was a bottle at his elbow and a glass standing in a pool of spilled liquor. Laing shook him awake. Crighton lifted his head and stared foolishly into the muzzle of the revolver.

"How—what's this, Mister?" he mumbled, gaping up at Laing.

"I'm borrowing one of your whale boats, Captain, you can pick it up at Aklavic. I'm telling you just to keep the record straight."

It took Crighton's rum-soaked brain a few minutes to grasp the import of the words. Then he got to his feet unsteadily.

"D'you know what you're doing, Mister?"

"Aye, I'll be waiting for you at Aklavic with Mr. Roul and Nick as witnesses, Captain. Now, just walk to your cabin."

Crighton was a bully but he was no coward and he knew men well enough to know that Laing would not shoot.

"Go to hell!" he swore. "You'll have to go all the way, Mister!" He lurched

forward with his arms outspread to grapple with Laing.

Laing took a quick pace forward, feinting with his left hand; then, as Crighton's hands went up to ward off the expected blow, he brought the barrel of the revolver on Crighton's head. Crighton went down. Swiftly Laing trussed him up.

When he came on deck he walked over to the binnacle and glanced carefully at the compass.

"Just keep her as she goes," he told the helmsman. "The drift is off-shore. When he starts to yell, better cut him loose."

"I'm hard o' hearing, Mister," replied the seaman.

Burk and Nick were in the boat waiting for him. Laing slid down the falls.

"Shove off!" said Laing. "There's a cap full of wind, and we've got to keep in the fog bank."

Burk braced himself and sent the boat away from the *Carlotta's* side with a heave and a curse. The sail was hoisted but there was not enough wind to give them steerage. They got out the oars and pulled away.

After an hour's steady pulling they rested. The *Carlotta* had vanished in the fog. According to Burk's reckoning they were five miles off shore with a two knot current to buck.

"Where away, Mister?" Nick asked.

"To the beach," said Laing. "Crighton's sure to come looking for us, and—"

"You can lay to that!" Burk interposed. "And he'll come roaring, shooting mad!"

"Aye," Laing agreed. "But we'll keep close in where he can't run us down. If he follows us all the way to Aklavic, it'll suit me."

"Maybe it won't be that easy," Nick warned. "He don't figure on you doin' any talkin' at Aklavic or anywhere else, Mister."

Just then the sun came up over the horizon. The bald, bleak head of Point Barrow, visible above the low-lying fog bank, was turned blood red. A heavy swell was running and the furious tumult of the waves breaking over the stony beach was like a faint sigh in their ears, barely audible. The wind shifted fitfully, dissolving the fog into a rose-tinted mist, then freshened and blew steadily offshore.

V

UNABLE to buck both tide and wind with the oars, they were forced to hoist the sail and tack. The fog-bank was driving seaward rapidly and their eyes swept the widening horizon, expecting to see the *Carlotta* materialize at any moment. Suddenly Nick let out a yell and pointed shoreward:

"Avast, hold her, mates!" he roared. "Sink me—it's him—look!"

Laing saw a whale boat flying before the wind, close inshore where the rugged headland jutted out into the sea with the white spume foaming at its base. It was the *Carlotta's* other whale boat, all right. It couldn't be anything else. He turned quickly and looked astern. The *Carlotta* had emerged out of the rolling fog bank, bearing about a mile to the northwest. Even as he watched she came about and clawed to windward, and he knew that the lookout had spotted them.

"You were right, Nick," he said, with a rueful smile. "He out-guessed us, all right. He's got us between the ship and the whale boat."

The expression of dismay that came to Burke's face was funny. He said: "How —what do we do now!"

"Run like hell!" said Laing.

"He got the weather gage," Nick shook his head dubiously. "And the *Carlotta* is edgin' in."

"Aye, she'll crowd us inshore," Laing agreed.

"It's Cyclone in the whale boat, for sure," said Burk, and lapsed into gloomy silence.

By this time the other whale boat was closing in at a good clip, her crew lining the weather gunwhale to keep her from shipping water. As they came closer Laing could see Crighton seated in the stern. The sun glinted on what looked like a rifle barrel across his knees. He was bearing down with the evident intention of cutting across his quarry's bow. Laing held his course.

The combined speed of the boats closed

the gap between them rapidly. Soon the distance had diminished to a hundred yards, then to fifty. Crighton's fog-horn voice bridged the gap:

"Heave to or I'll start shooting!"

"He ain't foolin', Mister!" said Nick with a quick look into Laing's face.

"He'd be crazy to do a thing like—"

Crighton's rifle spat fire before Laing could finish.

Burk, who was sitting immediately in front of him, clutched at his stomach, doubled up and toppled over. Laing swung on the steering oar. The boat came around and fled before the wind. Another bullet struck the water a foot short of him and skipped, whining over his head. Nick was bending over Burk. He looked up and said: "He's bad hurt, Mister. He's got it in the guts."

Laing realized that Crighton had not shot to warn, but deliberately to maim or kill. His hands tightened on the steering oar as if he would squeeze the heart out of the wood. The urge to strike back became irresistible.

He looked astern. He had gained some distance when he had come about; and since both boats carried the same spread of canvas he knew he could keep his distance. But the *Carlotta* was closing in, she'd force him to tack soon and that would give Crighton another chance to use his rifle. His eyes came to rest on a whale lance. He thought of coming about suddenly and running close enough to Crighton to—he gasped as the idea struck him. He turned it over in his mind for a moment, then:

"Load that harpoon gun, Nick," he said quietly. "Unbend the foregoer."

The harpooner's eyes jumped: "Say, you're not—"

"Aye, but I am!" Laing assured him. Then as Nick stared at him with his mouth open, he urged:

"Look, Nick, I've got to get help for Burk, get him aboard the *Carlotta*. He needs a doctor and he's going to get one if I have to run the *Carlotta* into Aklavic myself!"

"Now you're talkin', Mister! If you wasn't so damned conscientious you'd have done somethin' afore this."

"Aye, maybe you're right," Laing conceded. "Well, there's no choosing now. Load that gun! You'll be behind the sail where Crighton can't see what you're about."

A few minutes later Nick's voice floated back to him: "Ready, Mister!"

"Keep your head down and wait for the word, Nick," Laing told him.

He eased off the wind, allowing Crighton's boat to gain. As the gap closed a bullet sang passed his ear. His jaw set and his lips became a thin line. Suddenly he threw his weight against the steering oar. Obediently the boat came around, but a sea staggered her and she broached. Laing braced himself and stroked her around with the oar. The boom snapped over and she was away again, Laing hauled her close to the wind and bore down on Crighton almost headon.

Thinking that his quarry was trying double and run around his stern in an attempt to gain the beach, Crighton came about smartly and exposed his broadside.

"Now, Nick! Let him have it!"

THE harpooner sprang to his feet, balancing himself expertly. A moment later the gun bellowed. The boat staggered and then raced on. As they came out of the black powder smoke, shouts of dismay mingled with Crighton's bellow of rage. The heavy harpoon had gone clean through just above the waterline, shattering the boat's planking as if it were matchwood. She was filling rapidly, the sea pouring into her in twin fountains. Crighton was roaring at his crew, directing them to lash their oars athwartships—an old whaling trick that would give a stove boat stability and buoyancy enough to keep her afloat indefinitely.

"Bail, you swine!" roared Nick, exultantly. "Bail!"

"Blast you!" Crighton screamed back, "You'll pay for this! Blast you—you—"

His words were borne away on the wind as they swept past. But when Laing came about and headed for the *Carlotta* he was still raving, up to his waist in water, and shaking his clenched fists above his head.

The *Carlotta* was hove to with her sails flapping in the wind. Laing ran under her stern and shot alongside. Leaving

Nick to drop sail and make the boat fast, he grabbed one of the falls and went up it like a monkey.

Spoul was waiting for him, his big colt held in an unsteady hand. The watch stood clustered around bo'sun Biles, their eyes fixed on the mate.

"Grab that man, bo'sun!" Spoul's voice squeaked as Laing came over the rail. Not a man moved. Biles folded his arms and spat on the deck. Said he:

"Look, Mister, we don't know what this is all about. We knows that there ain't been nothin' done aboard this here ship to warrant shootin'. Me an' the boys has talked it over, an' we don't want no part of it!"

Fear leaped into Spoul's eyes. He licked dry lips and backed away.

"Better put that gun away," Laing advised, coolly. Mr. Burk's badly hurt. If he dies there'll be a charge of murder to answer."

"Murder!" Spoul gasped.

"That's what I said." Laing moved closer to him, and held his eyes with a steady look. "There's a man dying in that boat. What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know, I can't—" Spoul stammered, the colt dropped to his side held in a limp hand. "Murder—'struth! Where do I stand?"

"You'll be dancing at the end of a rope if Burk dies," Laing told him, coldly. "Pick Crighton up and put him in irons, then head for Aklavic. That's all there is to be done, Mister."

Spoul's face turned a sickly yellow: "Put Cyclone in irons—you're crazy! He'd kill me for it!"

"Sorry, but you're wasting time, Mister!" Laing stepped forward and hit him once.

"Get Mr. Burk below, bo'sun," he said crisply as Spoul collapsed.

"Aye, sir!"

Laing picked up the colt. He went to the rail and dropped it down to Nick in the boat. "Go get him, Nick. Clamp him in irons."

THE EYES HAVE IT

In the books of the nature fakers, animals are sometimes endowed with exceptionally keen sight. It is true that mountain sheep and certain birds see very well, but probably not as well as man. Of the animals in the Northwest, the wolf has the keenest sight; yet he cannot see you at 600 yards—unless visibility is very good. A polar bear is not likely to see you at more than 300 yards; but a caribou may see you at five hundred.

The harpooner grinned up at him. Said he: "Cyclone in irons aboard his own ship—now, ain't that somethin' to tell the gals!"

Three days later the *Carlotta* steamed into Aklavic. Bunting flew from the signal yards—a distress signal requesting immediate medical aid. Laing had done what he could for Burk and the youngster was putting up a stout battle for his life. The port doctor was aboard before the *Carlotta* dropped anchor.

Later Laing went ashore with Spoul. He told his story to the Shipping Master and a keen-eyed Inspector of the Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Polic. With Crighton safe behind bars, Spoul corroborated his statement and signed the affidavit with a hand that shook visibly.

"Where do I stand now?" he asked plaintively as he put down the pen.

The Inspector eyed him coldly. Said he: "I regret to say that there is nothing I can do about you, Mr. Spoul—unless Mr. Laing prefers charges."

"I don't choose to make any," said Laing promptly.

"But I'm not through with you yet." The Shipping Master put his oar in. "Upon the evidence of Mr. Spoul's own statement, I don't feel that he's fit to command a ship. You have a master's certificate, Mr. Laing. You'll have to sail the *Carlotta* back to Vancouver as soon as the Inspector is through with you. You'll hand her over to the authorities there. Tell your crew that, if necessary, she'll be sold to pay their wages. I think that is all, Captain."

The Ballad of Pious Pete

By ROBERT SERVICE

I tried to refine that neighbor of mine, honest to God, I did.
I grieved for his fate, and early and late I watched over him like a kid.
I gave him excuse, I bore his abuse in every way that I could;
I swore to prevail; I camped on his trail; I plotted and planned for his good.
By day and by night I strove in men's sight to gather him into the fold,
With precept and prayer, with hope and despair, in hunger and hardship and cold.
I followed him into Gehennas of sin, I sat where the sirens sit;
In the shade of the Pole, for the sake of his soul, I strove with the powers of the Pit.
I shadowed him down to the scrofulous town; I dragged him from dissolute brawls;
But I killed the galoot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.

God knows what I did he should seek to be rid of one who would save him from shame.
God knows what I bore that night when he swore and bade me make tracks from his claim.
I started to tell of the horrors of hell, when sudden his eyes lit like coals;
And "Chuck it," says he, "don't persecute me with your cant and your saving of souls."
I'll swear I was mild as I'd be with a child, but he called me the son of a slut;
And grabbing his gun with a leap and a run, he threatened my face with the butt.
So what could I do (I leave it to you)? With curses he harried me forth;
Then he was alone, and I was alone, and over us menaced the North.

Our cabins were near; I could see, I could hear; but between us there rippled the creek;
And all summer through, with a rancor that grew, he would pass me and never would speak.
Then a shuddery breath like the coming of Death crept down from the peaks far away;
The water was still; the twilight was chill; the sky was a tatter of gray.
Swift came the Big Cold, and opal and gold the lights of the witches arose;
The frost-tyrant clinched, and the valley was cinched by the stark and cadaverous snows.
The trees were like lace where the star-beams could chase, each leaf was a jewel agleam.
The soft white hush lapped the Northland and wrapped us round in a crystalline dream;
So still I could hear quite loud in my ear the swish of the pinions of time;
So bright I could see, as plain as could be, the wings of God's angels ashine.

THE BALLAD OF PIOUS PETE

As I read in the Book I would oftentimes look to that cabin just over the creek.
Ah me, it was sad and evil and bad, two neighbors who never would speak!
I knew that full well like a devil in hell he was hatching out, early and late,
A system to bear through the frost-spangled air the warm, crimson waves of his hate.
I only could peer and shudder and fear—'twas ever so ghastly and still;
But I knew over there in his lonely despair he was plotting me terrible ill.
I knew that he nursed a malice accurst, like the blast of a winnowing flame;
I pleaded aloud for a shield, for a shroud—Oh, God! then calamity came.

Mad! If I'm mad then you too are mad; but it's all in the point of view.
If you'd looked at them things gallivantin' on wings, all purple and green and blue;
If you'd noticed them twist, as they mounted and hissed like scorpions dim in the dark;
If you'd seen them rebound with a horrible sound, and spitefully spitting a spark;
If you'd watched IT with dread, as it hissed by your bed, that thing with the feelers that crawls—
You'd have settled the brute that attempted to shoot electricity into your walls.

Oh, some they were blue, and they slithered right through; they were silent and squashy and round;
And some they were green, they were wrigly and lean; they writhed with so hateful a sound.
My blood seemed to freeze; I fell on my knees; my face was a white splash of dread.
Oh, the Green and the Blue, they were gruesome to view; but the worst of them all were the Red.
They came through the door, they came through the floor, they came through the moss-creviced logs.
They were savage and dire; they were whiskered with fire; they bickered like malamute dogs.
They ravined in rings like iniquitous things; they gulped down the Green and the Blue.
I crinkled with fear whene'er they drew near, and nearer and nearer they drew.

And then came the crown of Horror's grim crown, the monster so loathsomely red.
Each eye was a pin that shot out and in, as, squidlike, it oozed to my bed;
So softly it crept with feelers that swept and quivered like fine copper wire;
Its belly was white with a sulphurous light, its jaws were a-drooling with fire.
It came and it came; I could breathe of its flame, but never a wink could I look.
I thrust in its maw the Fount of the Law; I fended it off with the Book.
I was weak—oh, so weak—but I thrilled at its shriek, as wildly it fled in the night;
And deathlike I lay till the dawn of the day. (Was ever so welcome the light?)

I loaded my gun at the rise of the sun; to his cabin so softly I slunk.
My neighbor was there in the frost-freighted air, all wrapped in a robe in his bunk.
It muffled his moans; it outlined his bones, as feebly he twisted about;
His gums were so black, and his lips seemed to crack, and his teeth all were loosening out.
'Twas a death's head that peered through the tangle of beard; 'twas a face I will never forget;
Sunk eyes full of woe, and they troubled me so with their pleadings and anguish, and yet

As I rested my gaze in a misty amaze on the scurvy-degenerate wreck.
I thought of the Things with the dragonfly wings, then laid I my gun on his neck.
He gave out a cry that was faint as a sigh, like a perishing malamute,
And he says unto me, "I'm converted," says he; "for Christ's sake, Peter, don't shoot!"

* * * * * * * *

They're taking me out with an escort about, and under a sergeant's care;
I am humbled indeed, for I'm 'cuffed to a Swede that thinks he's a millionaire.
But it's all Gospel true what I'm telling to you—up there where the Shadow falls—
That I settled Sam Noot when he started to shoot electricity into my walls.

THE SPENDER

By Frank Dufresne

Step up to the bar, gents, and hear Elbert—Elbert, the bum—say his goodbyes to the camp where he'd spent the best 40 years of his life.

ELBERT didn't have to guide his feet. They just naturally carried him down Nome's planked Front Street and through the swinging doors of the Board of Trade saloon. Pausing only slightly while Elbert rubbed the steam off his glasses and took a quick squint through the thick clouds of tobacco smoke, the feet walked him along rows of green tables where the sweet music of pool balls clicking sharply and the chattering undertone of celluloid chips sounded again after many weeks of great silence.

Good crowd on hand tonight, thought Elbert. Always was when the boys came in from the creeks at freeze-up and hung around town until the last steamer of the season carried them southbound to Seattle. For a week or two it was almost like old times.

His ragged and faded mackinaw conspicuous among the brighter colored jackets worn by the younger men, Elbert shoved his way through to the bar, fighting again for the privilege of buying a drink. Tasted better this way, he told himself. Reminded him some of the sinful, roaring days when Nome was the greatest camp in the North; back when Tex Rickard ran the old Northern. Reminded him of a lot of things, come to thing about it. Reminded him, for instance, that he was almost a stranger among all these young punks; him, Elbert Jones, one of the first men to come wading through the surf to stake a beach claim back in 1900. Reminded him of the time when he scooped a shovelful of dirt off bedrock on the Bessie Bench and watched it pan out sixty dollars in nuggets. That was the summer when he and twenty other miners racked up a fortune apiece in less than a month.

Nothing like that ever happened any more, thought Elbert. Now it was all big company operations—working for wages—fifteen or twenty dollars a day stuff. Watching the faces of these men of a later generation Elbert felt sorry for them. They had missed the real gold rush; would never know what it was like to share in the wild stampede that had made this camp famous.

Nick, the pale-faced bartender, was showing off before some of the chechakos, demonstrating the delicate scales he had used to weigh dust for drinks in the early days. No company checks then. People didn't trust paper money. When a gent set 'em up for the crowd he poured out gold from a leather poke. Careless with the stuff, too. Nick even dragged out the shallow pan he employed for panning the sawdust in front of the bar. You young fellows would be surprised at the colors a man could pick up next morning after a bunch of spenders like Elbert come bellying up to the bar, spilling dust out of their moose-hide pokes.

He winked at Elbert. Elbert, the plunger. Elbert, talk of the camp. Too bad these boys couldn't have seen that crazy night he had walked into town with enough gold to start a bank and blown it all away before daylight next morning. Never complained, either; not Elbert. One year he'd be running his own hydraulic outfit. Next year he was a common shovel stiff. But he took the good with the bad, never bragged and never winced.

"Tell these punks about it," said Nick. "Tell them how a real sport operated when he was in the chips."

Elbert, with a blue indigent's ticket in his pocket. Elbert, headed for the Pioneer's Home at Sitka with a set of leaky valves around his heart and a crumpled ten-dollar bill in pocket. Elbert, saying goodbye to the camp where he had spent the best forty years of his life.

"Listen, boys," said Elbert, "Did I ever

tell you about the time I pretty near run Tex Rickard out of town?"

"Set 'em up, Nick! The drinks are on me." Elbert's ten dollars didn't quite cover the treat but Nick said nothing. Close enough, seeing it was the last time.

"I was down to my last two-bits that night," started Elbert. "Dropped into Tex's place for a cup of coffee. But when I got there I felt more like a four-dollar platter of ham and eggs. So I walked over to the roulette table."

" 'Five is the number,' I says. 'Two-bits on number five'."

"It paid me 35 to 1. 'Let 'er ride,' I says, and she came right back to hit me again.

"Plenty for ham and eggs now, but I'd picked up another idea. Maybe this was another one of my nights to howl.

"I remember some of the boys with rabbit blood in their veins trying to get me to pull down. 'Stand back,' I says to them. 'Stand back and give a man a chance to spread his bets'." Elbert finished his drink and waited patiently while Nick clipped the end off a cigar and lit it for him.

"It looked like there wasn't any losing chips in my stack that night. In no time at all there was a big crowd at my table watching me rake in the yellow chips. The dance hall floosies had all pulled their suckers to a stop on the floor and come gathering around. Shaky Frank at the piano quit playing and swung around on his stool. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Tex standing there watching, hands folded behind his back, teetering on his heels, that poker-faced smile of his beginning to look a little bit thin around the lips. He'd heard about me before, figured maybe I wouldn't stop until I'd picked up at least a half interest in the place.

"But I had even bigger notions, because if my luck held on another ten minutes, and if Tex's nerve didn't fail him, I'd own the Northern, title clear. That's what I had in mind when I made my last play."

Elbert stopped, Nick eyeing him closely. He slid a jigger of rye across the bar. Elbert gulped it down, nodding gratefully.

"The wheel turned against me," he said. "Something told me it was going to, because I didn't even wait to see the end of the play. Instead, I walked right over to Tex Rickard and I says, 'Tex, lend me two-bits, will you? I want to buy a cup of coffee'."

V-ATTACK

The community spirit is highly developed among the Eskimos, and no doubt has been an important factor in their survival. Before the advent of the white man's rifle, they had a neat way of hunting caribou. The entire village, with the exception of the small children, participated.

Upon receiving a report from one of the hunters that a caribou herd was grazing a few miles distant, a council was called to deal with the situation. An ambush was determined upon, and two lines of monuments, leading to the bottom of a "V", were constructed. These monuments were made of rocks and sod to resemble men, and were set up from 50 to 150 yards apart. The lines might be anywhere between two miles and five miles in length, and the angle between them anywhere between 15 and 45 degrees. Through this funnel the animals were "shooed" like so many chickens.

At intervals of 200 or 300 yards, men, women, and the older children would be stationed, with instructions to close in slowly when the drivers came along. The drivers were strung out between the tops of the "V". The hunters, with bows, arrows, and spears, were distributed near the lower part of the "V". When drivers, standers, and hunters were all in their proper places, the caribou were startled by a very good imitation of a wolf howl. Almost immediately they showed signs of panic, and would mill about for a while before moving slowly away from the direction from which the howl came. If they veered in any direction except that leading to the bottom of the "V", they would be shunted off to one side by another howl —or by the barking or howling of dogs held in leash. In order to add to their terror, the caribou were then allowed to get the scent of both the dogs and the Eskimos.

By this time the thoroughly frightened herd could see the standers on the line of monuments. In their panicky state, they failed to differentiate between children and sod monuments—they all became dangerous enemies, and the only way to escape was to out-run them. If the idea of breaking through the thin line ever occurred to the fleeing caribou, they apparently lacked the courage to attempt it. So they were driven down to the bottom of the "V", where the hunters lay in ambush. The percentage of animals that escaped was very small.

The Mule-Shoe Legend

By Donna M. Newhart

His face was aged by mountain sun
And wind, and frosty nite,
When he dreamed alone 'neath a mountain sky,
His feet to a camp-fire bright.
His only companion, an old grey mule
That followed him down the street—
And everywhere, he was simply known
As gold-crazy, Panhandle Pete.

Oft in the shadow of bar or store,
Wherever an ear would listen,
He told of the riches he had found—
Of the yellow metal's glisten.
Of nuggets the size of his gnarled fist,
Of dust, ankle-deep to his mule—
His old eyes shone, voice cracked with the telling,
As he straddled his squeaky stool.

They listened, when time was heavy on hand,
Supplied him with whiskey—neat,
And laughed, at last, when they carried him out
In the cold, grey dawn, to the street.
Grinning, they watched, as he packed his mule.
A bacon slab, a bit of flour—
"Biscuits an' bacon ain't enough
When the biscuits all go sour!"

"Tis enow' for me, I thank'ee sir—
This time I travel light,
I want the back o' this ornery mule
For gold—when I make my strike!"
Year after year they watched him go.
Few cared enough to remember
That he would walk back, new stories to tell
In the early days of November.

Far were the trails he followed with ease
Over the mountain's slope.
His worldly possessions were numbered as few—
His shovel, his pan—and his hope.
Often he slept in a gully's swale,
Or on the spine of a mountain's back.
His spade dug many a shallow hole—
And these were his only track.

No stream was too small for him to find
If it held on its pebbly bed,
A "color" or two for his avid pan—
A dream for his avid head.

A thread of yellow in white quartz rock
Was reward for any climb.
And with grunt and groan and heaving sigh
The grey mule followed behind.

And so, one day he found it,
Yellow and gleaming and dear,
And as he looked with rheumy eyes
His worn old heart knew fear.
He had found it! His Eldorado!
Far from the paths of men—
Dear God—let me pack it on the mule
And make it out again!

No more to roam the silent hills,
No more sourdough bread
But a house—and the warmth of a friendly smile,
And the soft, sweet feel of a bed!
No fever touched him as he gazed
At the long-sought golden hoard
He raised his eyes to the silent skies
And whispered, "Thank'ee Lord!"

He made his camp on the stream's high bank
Where the sigh of the wind was bold,
And then from the dawn to the mountain dusk
He gathered and stored his gold.
As he worked, a song sprang to his lips
And he called to the grey old mule,
"They'll change their tune t' Panhandle Pete—
Regrettin' they called him a fool!"

The summer sun brought him work—and gold,
The summer nights brought him sleep.
And hour by hour his fortune grew
To a shimmering, shining heap.
With the coming of frost he broke his camp,
As was his general rule,
But this time the proof of his stories rode
On the back of the old, grey mule.

They traveled for many a weary mile.
"Now, mule, watch your feet
Yer carryin' green pastures fer yourse'f,
An' for me—a life that's sweet."
One day the faithful mule went lame,
Their journey was nearly thru,
On lifting his feet ol' Panhandle found
That he had cast a shoe.

No spares were there in the saddle packs,
But his laughter was loud and bold.
"A shoe yea want? By the holy God
I'll make yea a shoe of gold!"
He fashioned a crucible of stone,
And lined it smooth with clay,
And into it poured his yellow hoard
He touched it where it lay.

"When I tell 'em THIS *story back in town,"*
His voice was rough and slow,
"The'll call ol' Panhandle a liar still,
But I'll have the shoe to show!"
He fashioned it tenderly, and with care,
For at best it would be rough.
He drew one nail from each of the shoes
And fitted it to the hoof.

Then, carefully, slowly, they made their way,
Pete, guiding his faithful friend
To step in the softest part of the trail
Round every curve and bend.
Just outside of the little town,
Fearing they'd rob his pack,
He buried the rest of his precious gold
In its ragged, canvas sack.
He buried it deep, and he covered it well,
Of his actions he left no trace.

Then he hurried on, to tell them his tale,
Knowing his gold was safe.
They saw him come, as they always did,
And they greeted him with a jeer,
"An' how many sacks o' gold hev yuh got
On the ol' grey mule this year?"

He told them his story, twixt laugh and joke,
And drinks of whiskey—neat,
They chuckled still, in the cold, grey dawn,
When they threw him out, in the street.
"A horse-shoe o' gold? A likely tale!
But give the ol' devil his due,
He's talked tuh hisself so dag-gone long
He thinks his stories are true!"

They found him there, when the sun rode high,
While the morn was mountain-cool,
And over him stood, with hanging head
His only friend, the mule.
Stiff and cold, in death, he lay,
He'd traveled his last mile.
But tho' he had died in the muddy street,
His old face wore a smile.

And when they looked at the grey mule's feet
'Twas there for all to behold—
Gravelled and worn, but still in place,
A mule-shoe of solid gold.

FOOL'S GOLD

By G. W. TWEEDDALE

This was the life a crook could enjoy. Brain work, Roadhouse Slader called it. Baiting a sucker, and then lazing around waiting for a tug at the line.

THE SHREWD, shifty eyes of Roadhouse Jim Slader expressed keen disappointment as he shook the last of the gravel from the pan and squinted at the black sand. Only a few tiny grains of gold . . . and this was a bedrock pan. He muttered a curse.

Roadhouse was in the act of throwing the pan aside when an idea occurred to him. A thin smile curled his lips and he slapped his fat thigh. Why not? This was the most promising creek he had seen in the Tanana District, outside of the Fairbanks diggin's.

He seated himself on a rock and gazed up and down the stream. There was the schist bedrock, the well-rounded hills, also lots of broken quartz showing in the gravel. Yet he had not found gold. For some time Roadhouse sat deep in thought. For two long months he had toiled digging this shaft, confident of striking big pay on bedrock. Now, as mute testimony that there was no pay, just a few fine colors of gold.

Roadhouse did not like hard work. That was not his way. He had made good money in Alaska building roadhouses in likely looking places. Then, by throwing a few ounces of gold around where some prospector would be sure to find it and start a stampede, he would cash in by charging the miners three dollars a plate for pork and beans, and six dollars per flop on a pole bunk covered with spruce boughs.

Those had been good old days. That is, they had been until a certain big time operator had put the United States Marshal onto Roadhouse. And even recommended that a miner's meeting be called to blue ticket him out of Alaska.

Roadhouse rose and made his way upstream to where the gravel layers were thinner. He would have dug here in the first place only there was a likely looking pup coming in just above the spot he had selected for his shaft. Now he carefully examined the rim and decided that he could punch some small holes and drop a charge of gold in each.

Satisfied with the possibilities, he returned to his tent and prepared lunch, then lit his pipe and stretched on his bunk to think out his plan. He would salt the ground with the fifty ounces of gold he had in his poke. That done, he would go to Fairbanks and look up a proper sucker.

Ten days later Roadhouse Slader tamped into place the last half-ounce of gold and painstakingly destroyed all evidence of his work. He chuckled and rubbed his plump palms together. This trick would pull in some real swag, enough to take care of him for the remainder of his life.

All he had to do now was to find a proper sucker, which would be easy. Even some of the big time operators would fall for a lay like this.

That was it, a big time operator! Why not Jack Price? Not only would he make his home stake, but he would even the score with Price. Of course, he would have to be out of the Territory long before Jack Price got wise. Then he could play it safe and take his time looking up a fresh crop of suckers.

Twenty-five thousand dollars he'd ask as a down payment. Twenty-five grand, all in cash. And Jack Price, who had accused him, Jim Slader, of being a small time crook, would be the sucker. The job would have to be good to deceive Jack Price and his book engineers. But Roadhouse was not worried. He'd do a smooth job, all right. Just take in a few ounces and start talking to the right people, who,

in turn, would see that Price heard about it.

ONE week later Roadhouse Jim Slader was seated on a projecting slab of rock just above his camp. He had returned from Fairbanks the previous day, and felt that his trip had been very successful. In fact, Roadhouse was much pleased with himself. He stretched his fat legs and smiled as he reminisced.

He had just thrown the right kind of party, inviting Gentleman Bob to a good dinner, then a round of drinks, paying for it all with gold dust. He had played his hand smart. Telling nobody about his claims. Gentleman Bob would do that after Roadhouse departed for his mine.

Yes, knowing Bob's failing, not a scout in the Tanana would rest until they had Bob drunk . . . it was well known that once drunk the Gentleman would tell all he knew . . . and thus gain information as to where Roadhouse obtained his dust.

Roadhouse shook with merriment. In this case Bob would tell more than he knew. Not a soul in the Territory was wise to the fact that Gentleman Bob was his stool pigeon.

Roadhouse spent the day leisurely resting on the rock. This was the life he enjoyed. Brain work he called it. Baiting a sucker and then lazing around, waiting for a tug at the line. Finally he rose and lumbered to the tent. Too late for a prospect that day. Tomorrow would, he felt sure, bring results.

Bright and early the following morning Roadhouse sauntered from his tent and stretched comfortably on the rock. He lighted a cigarette and gazed skyward, wrapped in thought, until the sound of approaching hoofbeats caught his ear. He sat up and looked down the trail. Two horsemen were breaking over the bank, coming at a fast walk, straight for his camp.

When they were a hundred feet distant a broad smirk spread over his face. He had not even hoped for this good luck. He jumped down from the rock and hurried forward to meet the horsemen, extending a hand to each as they dismounted. The visitors were Jack Price and his head engineer.

"Mr. Price," began Roadhouse, "you told me that if I would get out into the hills and go to prospecting I would make some real money. This here has proved you were correct. And, Mr. Price, I owes it all to you." Roadhouse wiped an imaginary tear from his tricky eyes and fawned on Jack Price.

His act was good, he felt, and Roadhouse was just a little disappointed to see that the steel grey eyes of his prospective victim were directed not at him, but at the gravel banks along the stream. Any further attempt on the part of Roadhouse to demonstrate his deep appreciation was cut short by Dan Marshall, the engineer.

"Looks like this is pre-glacial gravel," Marshall remarked. "And the creek lies well for placer. Funny, none of the old-timers happened up this way. But they can't have, as your shaft is the only evidence of digging I've seen so far."

Roadhouse felt a wave of relief. This was real encouraging. "Like to pan the shaft bedrock?" he queried.

Marshall answered in the affirmative. Roadhouse quickly secured a pick and pan and led the way to the shaft. He was really proud of the job he had done here. It was most professional. And with a foot of water over the bedrock he would defy the most penetrating eye to detect his work.

Dan Marshall descended the ladder. Then, while the two men watched from the surface, skillfully ran down several pans; carefully wrapping the concentrate in small strips of canvas. Price asked no questions. But, as Dan shook the gravel from the last pan and scrambled to the surface, there was just a trace of a smile on Price's lips.

Marshall held the last pannings so Jack Price would see and, with Roadhouse peering over his shoulder, spun the water so as to free the gold from the sand. Roadhouse gasped. Not only were there three, quarter to half-pennyweight nuggets, but a long string of flower gold. The nuggets he could account for; but fine gold, no. He had panned that bedrock, and three to four fine colors were the most he had recovered.

Jack Price was the first to speak. "It would appear," he said, "that the prospect warrants a thorough investigation of the property. Particularly so as the geology is favorable." Still gazing down at the pan, he addressed Roadhouse. "Tell you what I'll do, Slader. Make you an offer. Twenty-five thousand cash, conditioned upon thirty day's sampling; or fifty thousand, to be paid out of production."

Roadhouse squirmed. If only he knew where that fine gold came from. He stepped to the shaft and peered intently at the rippling water covering the bedrock. Suddenly a possible explanation occurred to him. He had salted the shaft last, emptying his poke. Perhaps there had been some fine gold in the bottom of his poke, and Marshall just happened to get it in his last pan. Yes, that must be it. He turned to Price. "I'll accept that offer. And we'll make the price twenty-five thousand dollars cash."

One hour later Roadhouse, having bade his guests farewell, was seated on the edge of his bunk, clasping a copy of the contract. Suddenly his corpulent body commenced to shake in a burst of convulsive laughter. Roadhouse almost choked with hilarity and great tears ran down his cheeks.

For the next two days he was busy scattering some additional gold dust (secured on his last trip to Fairbanks) on exposed patches of bedrock along the rim. He did not bother to repan the shaft. It would just be lost labor, he felt.

DAN MARSHALL and his crew arrived on the morning of the third day. Roadhouse looked the outfit over. There was the usual drill rig and camp outfit. Then, as his eyes fell upon the last wagon, Roadhouse started on a clumsy dogtrot for Dan Marshall, who did not appear to notice the big man's approach but continued to direct the crew in the setting up of the camp.

Roadhouse spoke in a dignified, hurt voice. "I would like to know just how you propose to prospect these claims," he questioned, glancing towards the last wagon, which was piled high with sluice boxes. "My contract with Mr. Price gives him thirty days to prospect this property. Prospecting, you know, does not mean sluice-box mining." For a moment Roadhouse hesitated, giving Marshall a chance to explain. Then, as Marshall did not even look his way, Roadhouse continued in his most injured tone. "I am deeply grieved, Mr. Marshall, that this misunderstanding has arisen."

Dan Marshall's face twitched in a faint smile. He really was amused; not only by Roadhouse's tone, but his attempt at dignified English.

"You might," he suggested, "read paragraph six of your contract. This, I believe, gives the Price Mining Company thirty days to prospect your property, using whatever methods they may see fit to employ."

Without a word Roadhouse turned and waddled to his tent. Dan Marshall watched the fat man out of the corner of his eyes, and a broad grin replaced his smile. Roadhouse was indeed putting it on. Head erect and paunch extended, he was the picture of injured dignity.

As soon as Roadhouse reached the privacy of his tent he lifted down a pasteboard box from a high shelf and withdrew the contract, then anxiously turned to paragraph six. He read and re-read the words, not believing, even yet, he could have overlooked them. But he had. Paragraph six contained the joker. *"The Licensee shall have full and exclusive possession of the above mining claims for a period of thirty days, and shall have the right to prospect said premises, employing whatever methods Licensee may see fit to employ in said prospecting."*

The huge bulk of Roadhouse slumped. Why had he not examined the contract more closely? His various shady enterprises had made it necessary for him to study some law, and he was fully aware that the paragraph he had just read meant that Price could employ sluice box methods if he wished to. He could also put the owner off the property in the interval.

At that moment the tent flap parted and the smiling face of Dan Marshall was framed in the doorway. "I am deeply grieved, Mr. Slader," he said, "to have to inform you that we will be doing some

ground sluicing tomorrow, and it happens that your camp will be in our way." Then, as if an afterthought: "Perhaps a thirty day vacation in Fairbanks would do you good. I note that you have developed some vulgar callouses on your hands. Not the thing, Mr. Slader, for a business man."

Roadhouse rose stiffly and commenced to pack his outfit. An hour later, as he threw the last hitch on his packhorse and headed towards the Fairbanks trail, Dan Marshall left the drill rig and fell in alongside of Roadhouse. His smile had disappeared, and he spoke in a crisp, business-like tone.

"Mr. Price requested me to tell you that he would expect you to call at his office in Fairbanks on the last day of his option with you. At such time he will either pay you the twenty-five thousand dollars or quit claim the property back to you."

Roadhouse was still too dumbfounded at having allowed Jack Price to inject a joker into the contract. He only nodded dully and started down the Fairbanks trail.

IT was the morning of July 22nd, the day the Price Mining Company would have to put up the twenty-five thousand dollars or return the property to the original owner.

Roadhouse reluctantly climbed the stairs to Price's office. For thirty days he had been unable to obtain any information concerning Roadhouse Creek (as Marshall had dubbed the Slader property) and he was nervous. He was not so confident now that the sharp eyes of Marshall had not detected some evidence of the salting of the claims. He was very apprenhensive; he might be jailed if they could prove that he had salted the claims.

Gingerly he opened the door and peered in. Price was seated at his desk; his secretary, notebook in hand, close by. On seeing Roadhouse, Price smiled and motioned to a chair, then went on dictating until the letter was finished. Roadhouse wet his lips nervously as Price swung his chair around to face him.

"We have decided to exercise our option on your property, Mr. Slader," Price announced, as he picked up some papers from a basket and motioned Roadhouse to come and occupy the chair across from him. Spreading the papers before Roadhouse, he continued. "You will sign where the 'X' appears, and my secretary will acknowledge your signature."

Then, as Roadhouse's trembling fingers scrawled his name, Price laid down a certified check for twenty-five thousand dollars. Roadhouse grasped the check in the same manner that a hungry dog grabs a bone, and, after several fumbling attempts, managed to place it in an inner pocket. For several seconds he sat staring across the desk at Price, not daring to believe, even now, that he had really closed this deal. What a dumb sucker Price was. Little by little his courage returned and he stood up, towering to his full height and expanding to his full width.

"Mr. Price," he declared majestically, "you will have to admit that I was right when I told you one year ago that it does not require real experience to be a suc-

LAST CALL!

Perhaps the most surprised polar bear in the history of the Arctic was the one which met Hadley, of Stefansson's last expedition, a few feet from the winter hut one morning. It was during the period of darkness, and Hadley was carrying a lantern. Instinctively he swung it against the bear's nose, breaking the glass and putting out the light. While the bear was recovering his wits, Hadley dashed into the hut, gave the alarm, grabbed his rifle, and set out on the trail of the bear.

His .30-.30 was not very effective, and he merely succeeded in wounding the animal. When he ran out of ammunition, he borrowed the cook's rifle. At this point, the bear charged. Hadley stood his ground; he had faced polar bears before. When the bear came within four yards of him, Hadley aimed at his open mouth and pulled the trigger. There was no report; there were no cartridges in the rifle!

The polar bear towered over the explorer. No other member of the expedition dared risk a shot in the semi-darkness. Hadley thought with the rapidity of chain lightning. He turned his rifle cross-wise, and thrust it into the bear's mouth, as he would a horse's bit. The cream-white monster clamped down upon the stock; one of his teeth actually penetrated Hardley's hand. The harried animal shook his head once, throwing Hadley to the ground. Then he released his grip on the rifle stock. As he turned to run, he was killed by other members of the expedition.

DOUBLE UP

One of the drawbacks of an ordinary canvas tent in the Arctic is that hoar-frost forms on the inside when the cold from the outside meets the warm air in the tent. This makes the tent difficult to load on a sled and adds to its weight. Moreover, the hoar-frost falls in flakes on the fur clothing and sleeping bags of the occupants—and melts in the warm atmosphere when breakfast is being cooked. A double tent, with a two-inch air space between the inner and outer covers, and a ridge-pole, is worth the additional cost and weight, and the extra trouble required to put it up. For in zero weather it is at least 20° warmer than the single tent, and hoar-frost will not form on the inner cover unless the outside temperature is considerably below zero. If a little hoar-frost does form, it can be dislodged by beating the tent with a stick while it is still standing.

TREASURE HUNT

It was not until 1858, six years after the Investigator *was abandoned by McClure in the Bay of Mercy, that the Eskimos discovered the ship frozen fast in the ice. The news spread for hundreds of miles to the south and east, and the Bay of Mercy for at least twenty years became a place of pilgrimage for the natives of that region. To them, the vessel, with her strips of iron and sheets of copper, was a veritable treasure house. They made trips of two hundred miles to get material for knives, spears, arrow-heads, bows, arrows, and so forth.*

cessful miner or prospector, just a little luck." Under his breath he added, "and a little sucker."

Price did not answer. He was idly drumming with his finger tips on the desk, and his face was turned towards the window. Roadhouse dropped back into his chair. He could not resist gloating, just a little over his victim. As he opened his mouth to begin, Jack Price suddenly turned quickly and faced him.

"I wonder, Mr. Slader, if you would care to hear Marshall's report on the property we have just purchased from you?"

A lump rose in the throat of Roadhouse, almost choking him, and his hands shook. Maybe he had been a little previous in believing himself safe and secure. But all he could do now was to nod accent to Price's question.

Price cleared his throat and commenced:

"'Roadhouse Creek, July 20th.

"'I have completed my examination of the five mining claims embraced in the Slader property, and must recommend that you exercise the existing option.

"Dividing the property into two blocks: The average pay per cubic yard on block one, containing some 292,000 yards, is $2.28 per yard. (This does not include the fifty-odd ounces of foreign gold introduced into the ground by the former owner.)

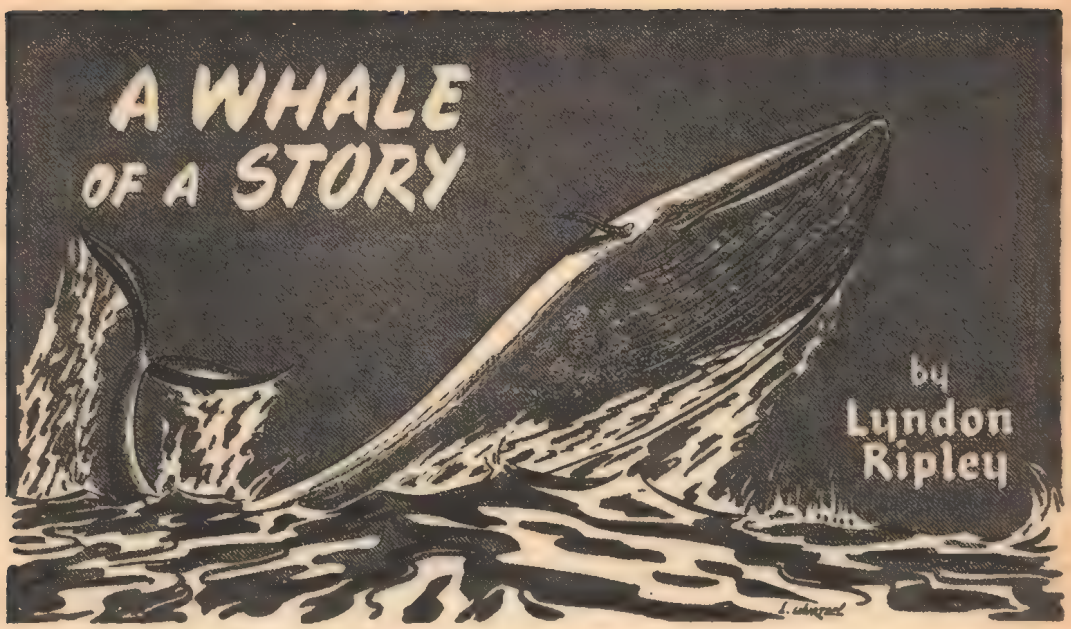
"'Block two, shows some 312,000 cubic yards, with average gold recoveries of $4.66 per yard.

"'As reported to you earlier, a goodly percentage of the values, quoted above, occur in the gravel and not on the bedrock. This, you will understand, is a preliminary report. Details to follow.'"

Price closed the report and looked squarely into the now pallid face of Roadhouse. "Mr. Slader," he said sternly, "in resorting to your usual methods of crooked dealing you have not only lost a fortune, but you have convicted yourself, beyond any shadow of a doubt, of a crime you were only suspected of having committed. I refer to the fifty-odd ounces of gold you highjacked off Dan Murphy, when Dan was lying unconscious and near death on the Tundra Creek trail. The same fifty ounces you used to salt these claims with. "Two things you slipped up on, Mr. Slader: First, Klondyke gold is, to the experienced miner, easily identified. Second, two of these nuggets were marked. Dan was keeping them for a watch charm . . . one was almost the exact shape of a fish's head and the other like the tail. I remember Dan showing them in my office And now, Mr. Slader, the United States Marshal is waiting for you at the outer door"

Roadhouse slowly rose and reluctantly started for the door.

"By the way, although these two nuggets placed together represent a fish, to the best of my recollection it was not a sucker, Mr. Slader."



THERE are some authorities who like to cast for speckled beauties in an Alaskan stream. Other sportsmen, considerably more adventurous, combine pleasure with business. They venture out on deep, cold seas in a peanut shell and, with modern arrowhead and a puff of powder, bring in the biggest of big game.

It is so big that, for verification, we are referred to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, in their report concerning the Sulphur-Bottom Whale, as it is known in northern waters, or the "Blue," known as such in the Atlantic. One of these big game species may reach a volume of 150 tons, a weight *"four times that of the largest prehistoric monster, such as the dinosaur, and equal to the weight of thirty-seven elephants or a hundred and fifty fat oxen."*

Of course it isn't sport fishing, taken as such. It's on too big a scale. Yet we don't mean the wholesale killing of mammals by stinger boats for the factory ships. What we have in mind is the whale or killer boat operating from a shore station in the Far North.

It's a he-man job, this shore whaling. It takes brains and brawn and deftness, like any worthwhile angling, to bring in your quarry at all. But alas, like all developments that pass with time, with the unceasing urge for speed, streamlines and volume, small boat harpooning, working independent of a processing mother ship, has almost nose-dived into history.

In the old days, from 1650 to 1860, American whaling was at full tide. It was an exciting business. Every man, woman and child was interested; fathers were expert in their craft, and debts were paid in whale oil and whalebone, even ministers' and schoolmasters' salaries. Buggy whips, hoops for skirts, umbrella ribs, springy upholstering for furniture and corset stays were made of whalebone. Whale oil was used for illumination and it was a wonderful leather preservative.

When a fresh whale was beached, whale steaks were "cut on the small," for everyone; children were brought up on whaling stories and nourished on whale meat. The flesh was solid and somewhat coarse-grained, but properly prepared it was hardly distinguishable from beefsteak. More than once a youngster hurried over to his grandmother's house for a piece of her "whale mincemeat pie."

In 1850 any Alaskan lad, if given a choice, would have preferred being a whaler rather than President of the United States.

The prettiest damsels in town admired the big game hero, the master nimrod. It was a great honor to come ashore

covered with whale's blood. Some of the young bucks even went around for a day or so with gore splashed all over their faces and clothes, too vain to wash it off. Talk about the pride of fishermen!

Even the older men had to be provided for. Wives in Nome and Sitka made prodigious meals for their men out whaling along shore, for even on a twelve to twenty-four hour chase, no victuals were taken along. Whaling, said experienced anglers, required "clear heads, empty stomachs and no excess baggage." At best it was a cold, uncomfortable business. All the fellows wore heavy woolens. They soaked their knitted woolen mittens in brine, wrung them out and let them freeze on the hand. The back ice coating was protection from zero weather and the hand inside was warm, though wet.

FROM 1650 to 1760 whaling was in sight of the home "scuttle"—a trap door in the roof, approached through the attic—and big game fishing was comparatively safe. All the crew had to worry about was a stove boat, the mammal's earthquake flukes, or that a bight of line might snarl around their ribs and whip them overboard. Being thrown thirty feet into the air was all in the day's fun. A stout lad just climbed back into his cedar double-ender, if it hadn't been knifed in two or crushed entirely, and calmly continued to "dart in" his whale.

There were theoretical dangers, however, even if the four or five oarsmen, harpooner-commander and steersman pooh-poohed their own Herculean achievements. It is recorded that a salt-sprayed enthusiast described, in a sworn statement, the deadly battle between a sperm whale and a sea serpent!

If the good fishermen of those early days had been told a similar story about a "whaling factory" in years to come, they likely would have crowned the tale bearer king of the cracker-box Paul Bunyans. For indeed it was a far cry from a twenty-eight-foot whaleboat, tussling with a sixty to eighty-ton whale, to the 570-foot *Sir James Clark Ross* that docked at New York periodically, some years ago, to unload her oil. This floating plant—and there are others larger now—had an 18,000-ton load of whale oil in her tanks—2,500,000 dollars worth. Fourteen hundred whales had been caught, killed and processed inside of a four-month period. Deck space accommodated ten whales. The white enameled electric "kitchen" and ventilating system was worthy of a metropolitan hotel.

But it was in the brave little killer boats that adventure aplenty was to be had. One tale of this early epic period was told and re-told ashore and afloat. It concerned a crew working out of the Bering Strait area.

One morning, bright and early, the cry of "Whale Off!" was heard. The local citizens saw the "weft," or flag signal, fluttering on the beach pole. A master crew hastily put out in their green whaleboat. The big mammal was overhauled and the bow harpooner "darted in" his lance. The attached line smoked as it ran around the logger head and through the chock from the coil tub. Water had to be poured in the gunwale to keep the wood from catching fire.

The whale gave a mighty roar, picked up its flippers and tore out of there. The speed of flight became so great that the hair came off the heads of three whalemen and a fourth lost his eyelashes. The pitch between the boat's seams melted from the friction of the water, and the crew were compelled to bail for dear life with their hats, in order to keep afloat. Finally the captain-harpooner was able to turn his head around. He saw a green boat behind them, exactly like their own, and it had no business being where it was.

With great difficuty he leaned over and looked along the gunwhale. His face blanched, eyes bugged out and mouth opened in amazement. Finally he mastered his unbelief, reluctantly pulled his knife and cut the line attached to the harpoon that was fast in the aquaplaning rorqual.

As the boat slowed down he sighed deeply and said, "Boys, it's been a right smart sleighride, but it's time to quit when that air critter tows us so fast he pulls our whaleboat right out o' her paint!"

But in times less exciting, Humpbacks, Sperms and "Right" Whales were harpooned and brought to shore and later

beached with a tow line, assisted by the tide. The "Rights" had everything—the yield of oil and whalebone was the cream of the herd. When a man heard "who-oo," slow-like, it was a "Right"; if he heard "whoooh," quick-like, it was a Finback, and not as desirable. When giving chase the whalers warily avoided the "slick"—the slight oil ooze left on the surface. Because the whale's ability to distinguish water-borne sounds was so acute, the big time anglers believed it afforded some kind of mysterious warning communication.

This kind of strenuous fishing had varied effects upon the husky whalers. When the blood began to fly, men were known to faint dead away. Others grew violently sick. If the individual was an especially hardy specimen, he waited until the whale was really dead, then "hove ahead" in his nervous reaction.

THERE is a story that a man by the name of Hamilton killed, in 1670, the first whale. The feat was considered so remarkable that he was compelled to leave his northern town and advised not to return. Fellow Alaskans were convinced that he was in league with the Devil.

Thus it is apparent that these big game fishermen were truly religious. If a whale was sighted on the Lord's Day, the reward of finding was not payable; it was said it "was not seemly" even to walk on the beach on the Sabbath. If whales were strewn like smelt all over the beach its entire length, no one would touch or even see them.

It has been said that a good hundred years prior to the Boston Tea Party, three "plantations" on the northern eastern seaboard complained most bitterly against the well-known taxation without representation. The keynote which they set led direct to Bunker Hill. Thus, has been the contention, whales and not tea were the cause of the first major difference between the American colonists and the Old World.

In 1625 the Dutch led the world in this sea-going business; soon after this date England crashed the field and dominated waters in the Far North. And still further back, dating from the year 1000, the Basques led the whaling world for five hundred years. Even before Columbus discovered America whale meat, especially the delectable tongue, was being marketed to particular consumers at Biarritz, Bayonne and other hamlets along the Bay of Biscay. In fact whale oil and bone had a ready sale all over Europe.

We could even scan the achievements of the Norsemen, those blonde Vikings who did remarkable things on the ocean besides hunt the great whale. But let us get back to the present and take a good look at what all these folks were concentrating on—the big shot himself.

Even after all these centuries there are many strange things about our biggest of big game that we do not understand. Books have been written about the cachelot and the rorqual; experts have devoted years of study to the mammals. And yet what we don't know would fill an ample library shelf.

We understand that the whale is a relative of the porpoise and the seal, for it is a warm-blooded specie and suckles its young with milk. But try and get a sample of that milk in the virgin state, before the big mama's spirit departs. Good men have tried. Perhaps they have gleaned some cow-milk-like fluid, but dyed-in-the-wool whalers stubbornly deny that it's the real McCoy. They contend that a baby gets a nice thick stream of mayonnaise-like cream smack between the lips as it suckles its mother, lying relaxed on her side.

It sounds plausible enough, coming as it does from old salts who ought to know. But the most interesting point about this yellowish, oily, V-8 powered liquid is its stupendous power to produce growth. Give the calf a standing start and it gains weight at the rate of about two hundred pounds a day, with an intake of about twenty-two gallons each twenty-four hours. It figures about—yes, you said it—ten pounds to the gallon. Many scientists today would give their right arm for the true analysis of the real milk before the glands clamped shut at the instant of death. If our own mothers' milk had this almost unbelievable potency, we would be a race of supermen.

All whales give milk but there are two kinds of the critters, differing fundamen-

tally, one from the other. The cachelot, or toother, such as the Sperm, can consume an octopus, shark or seal without a grimace. The baleen-type monster, the *Balaenoptera*, so-called because of strainer plates in its mouth, has a different problem. It is the biggest big fry that has ever existed on this earth and is actually with us today, yet it cannot swallow marine food larger than a sardine. Most of its food is smaller than that and it includes shrimp, "clione borealis," or brit and prawns by the ton.

Another strange assertion, voiced by a few authorities, is that whales are close relatives to elephants, proving the point by the similarity of the bristle formation. They even call attention to the vestiges of ancestral fur on the inner skin of some of the species, indicating kinship with the pachyderms.

When the flippers of present-day whales are boiled down and the skeletons can be examined, it is found that paws, or hand-like bone formations, still remain. The pelvic bones, near the genital organs, are the last reminders of hind legs.

TODAY we see ear dents and nostril dimples that ages ago were in active use; today they are just ornaments. The big fellows, which we curiously examine after the catch, breathe through the top of their heads and, if submerged too long, would suffocate. Their lungs breathe air just as do those of humans, and have no connection with their mouths, which lead to the cavernous stomachs.

The life of the whale isn't such an easy one, outside of man's conquest. The Humpback, for instance, homely and ungraceful, is the clown of the clan and loves the shore and "waterbatics." He breaches, lop-tails and fins, yet collects a lot of barnacles. His black, rubbery body is pock-marked and scarred, and his fins and snout are usually well-populated with countersunk cup barnacles, their parasites and parasites of the parasites. Likely as not his serrated stomach and body creases are filled with sea lice, big as a fingernail and not unlike a diminutive crab.

The "California Grey," as the salt-nosed anglers put it, is an oddity too. Among whalers it is a living fossil, and it is now protected by law the year round. Authorities state that the Grey, a baleen or whalebone type, feeds on amphipods, resembling sand fleas, but old timers wag their heads and contend that its diet consists of vegetation which it digests with stones.

The "Right" whale is, as has been mentioned, the best of them all. The "Sei," so named because of its visitations to Norway with Sei or coalfish, is moderately popular for its oil.

The "Finback" is a beauty, possessing a long, streamlined body, marbled black above with a white ridged belly. It averages about eighty feet in length and will make, when frightened, a good twenty-five miles an hour. Perhaps this is why it collects no barnacles.

The "Sperm" differs from its brethren in that it has a slender lower jaw, thoroughly equipped with six to eight-inch teeth like small-model tusks. It is shaped like a barrel attached to a tail, but it is highly popular with business fishermen out for investments. Just after the kill, if the nose is opened up, thirteen to eighteen barrels, of clear, grade A-1 oil can be dipped out by the bucketfull. If allowed to cool the liquid turns to spermaceti.

The "Blue" or "Sulphur-Bottom," so-called from the yellowish film of diatoms on its belly, sometimes reaches a length of 140 feet, or about a ton to the foot which, by the way, is a safe measuring method for any whale. The calves are twenty-three to twenty-six feet long at birth; they are weaned in about seven months when averaging fifty-two feet long. The minute the baby sees the light of day it has to keep up with the herd.

Then there is the Bowhead, the Bottleneck, True's Beaked Whale, Cuvier's Whale, the Pigmy Sperm, the Pilot Whale, the White Whale and the Killer. The foregoing, for oil reasons, are not especially desirable, especially the Killer.

Now there's big game on the fin if you want a real battle for your money. The Killer is always looking for trouble. About half the size of regular whales, nevertheless it is not to be sneezed at. It travels and hunts in packs of five to forty, swimming side-by-side in close military

formation, rising and diving smultaneously. It's so powerful and unceasingly ravenous that Grey whales turn belly up in fright, unable to move; White whales and seals flee for their lives.

The Killer can gulp a young walrus or porpoise with one swallow, and tear and eat out the tongues of living whales three times larger than themselves. The powerful interlocking jaws equipped with ten to fourteen large conical teeth, guarantee sudden death to any unwary living object in their path. The Killer fears nothing, stops at nothing, and is good for nothing.

On the other hand, the forthright whales, peaceful and affectionate to their offspring, the really "big time" fellows, contribute largely to man's well being. Their oil is used in the preparation of edible fats, face and laundry soaps, face creams, ointments, candles, paints and varnishes; in the tanning of leather and in treating coarse woolen cloths; for cordage manufacture, screw cutting, steel tempering, munitions, surgical and firearm lubricants.

We know how to hunt our friendly *Balaenoptera*, how to distinguish one specie from another by the snout and conformations, even from far off. We know how to use his bulk to best advantage, even the meat for dog food and the bones for fertilizer of the richest kind. But despite our big game angling and studies, many "unknowns" enter into the relationship.

How do whales communicate with one another, even when hundreds of miles apart, deep down in the sea? Why does the Humpback, for instance, have a tiny hair on top of each "wart" on his or her nose? Just where do they bear their young, granted that they seek the tropics? Why are there so few instances of twins?

The subject is as voluminous as the whales themselves and as fascinating.

It isn't any pipe dream when the statement is made that cetaceans are no small fry.

The next issue of

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ON YOUR NEWSSTAND AUGUST 15

"NEITHER SNOW, NOR RAIN, NOR..."

BY EDWARD A. HERRON

WHEN PETE CUSTER was easing the *Barker* into the heavy swells where the waters of Gastineau Channel and Stevens Passage collide headlong before the Alaska mainland, Miss Patterson slid open the door of the wheelhouse and came in. She looked about critically, fingering the fountain pen and black note book perched conspicuously in the breast pocket of her gray suit.

"We'll check your Registered mail and C.O.D.'s with the postmaster at each port," she announced, "and we'll clear up any complaints."

"Haven't been any complaints the four years I've had the mail run."

Miss Patterson smiled tolerantly and consulted her notebook. "The Juneau postoffice is claiming two empty mail sacks from you. We'll have to charge you for them, of course, and any other Government property that may be missing. It's customary," she added hastily, "at the termination of any contract, you know."

"Look," Pete protested, "I used those sacks to patch a hole in the bow when we ran aground last December." He turned his head, his ears cocked back to the smooth rumble of the Diesel. "Forgot to tell you my cook quit ten minutes before we left Juneau. You'll have to rustle your own grub because Joe and I can't be bothered playing steward, not even to Postoffice inspectors."

Miss Patterson sniffed and backed out. Later she slid open the door of the wheelhouse with her shoulder and came in, juggling a pot of coffee in one hand and a plate of sandwiches in the other.

"I thought I'd make the trip as pleasant as possible," she said, bracing herself against the table serving as a chart desk.

"Like bringing the condemned his last meal, isn't it?"

Miss Patterson frowned. "I'm sure you're making this final inspection doubly difficult, Captain Custer, with all your remarks. I can't help it if you're a victim of progress." She glanced at the chronometer on the wall by Pete's head. "We've been out an hour, and a plane can do the same distance in five minutes."

When they pulled away from Harkness' fox farm on Admiralty Island, Miss Patterson pulled the notebook from her pocket. "You realize, of course," she accused Pete, "that the fox farm wasn't a scheduled stop?"

"Sure thing, but how's the guy going to get his groceries?"

"You're a mail carrier, not a grocery clerk. Why doesn't he go in to Juneau himself?"

Pete looked at her sideways, smiling. Then he leaned over and whispered confidentially. "This month he can't leave day or night—the mama foxes are expecting!"

Miss Patterson flushed and bent over the chart table.

At Point Young they picked up six little Tlingit kids on their way down to the mining company's doctor at Funter Bay, and Miss Patterson was inundated in the galley trying to keep abreast of appetites. She dove back into the wheelhouse. "I don't mind cooking for those Indian children," she snapped, "but I do think you should stop them from having pillow fights with the mail sacks."

Pete restored order, then hurried back to the wheel. "Miss Patterson," he called over his shoulder. "Don't forget to mark it down in the notebook."

She stopped, stung, then shot back at him. "Well, you can be sure those children won't act like that when the plane has the run."

"No," Pete agreed, "the plane isn't scheduled for Point Young and Funter. Those kids just won't get to go."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

Pete turned on her savagely. "That plane's going to make ten stops where I make thirty-two. The people in between are supposed to get to the plane stops somehow or other. Just how, nobody's figured

out. Some days, sure, they could almost paddle a canoe from one end of the Strait to the other, but other times, with the wind pouring out of Icy Straits—" He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sorry. Sour grapes, I guess."

A wave slapped viciously at the bow of the *Barker*, and she noticed that the stars were blinking out over the shoulder of the mountains. There was a soft sighing of wind, then a moan that crept upward on a rising note as the freezing currents of air came shrieking down from the ice box of Glacier Bay.

For an hour they fought the storm, the *Barker* climbing high on the waves, then sinking abysmally into wide troughs.

On the tiny forepeak Miss Patterson could see thin white layers of ice forming, bulging in odd, dripping lumps as the sleet came and added to them. Suddenly she grasped Pete's arm and shouted, "Straight ahead there! It's a dory!"

Pete flicked on the searchlight jutting from the wheelhouse, playing it upon the tumbling waters, then holding it in wobbly circles on the tiny craft sliding about on the waves. In the dancing rectangles of black and yellow they saw the inert form stretched on the bottom of the dory.

Joe came running up the companionway, nodded as Pete yelled into his ear, then ducked below again. The heavy throbbing of the engine ceased, and the *Barker* pitched unevenly on the heaving waves. Pete looked about uncertainly, then pulled Miss Patterson toward him. "You'll have to take the wheel. Try to keep this side of the dory, and for heaven's sake, don't turn broadside into those seas!"

She was trembling, then suddenly she was rigid, straining to keep the battered *Barker* under control. Out of the corner of her eyes she saw Pete slip from the wheelhouse, heard him chopping the ice on the side of the wooden walls, then in the pitching yellow light she saw him creep forward, a boathook in his right hand. He leaned far over the rail, and Miss Patterson was conscious of the grinding motion of her own teeth as she followed his straining movements. For a moment the waves lifted the *Barker* on high as though to come crushing down on the dory, then it slipped to one side, and the hook in Pete's hand flashed outward. Miss Patterson screamed for Joe, who came running up the companionway and fought his way outside to help the skipper.

They brought in one form, frozen, and set it hastily on the deck of the wheelhouse, off to one side. Then they came back, carrying between them a woman who stirred uneasily and opened her eyes. Pete reached for the wheel. "Give it everything you've got, Joe. We're dropping the hook beyond the Point."

Miss Patterson knelt on the deck, rubbing at the woman's wrists. As the *Barker* came to rest, rolling easily in the shelter of the Point, the woman opened her eyes and looked first at the inert form across from her. "Kit's dead," she whispered. "He laid on top of me to keep me warm." She let her head roll from side to side with the pitch of the ship, then she spoke again. "We started down to Angoon to catch the plane over to the hospital in Juneau. The storm came up sudden."

"But," Miss Patterson protested, "the plane service doesn't start for another two weeks."

"That's what I tried to tell Kit when we got that letter from the postoffice, but he didn't read so good." Suddenly the muscles in her jaw contracted and she shut her eyes tightly. When she opened them, she looked at Miss Patterson intently. "I'm glad there's a woman aboard," she murmured. "I'm going to need help—right now."

An hour later Miss Patterson took time out to scribble a note in the little black book, *"—and because of the highly specialized services rendered, it is strongly recommended that mail boat operation on the island run out of Juneau, Territory of Alaska, be continued in cooperation with the newly established plane service."*

She looked up at the skipper who was wielding a pair of scissors on an old Army blanket.

"Before I forget, Pete—I dumped the mail from the Kake sack into the galley cupboard. I needed the empty sack to line this box for the baby."

WOOD-RATS BITE DEEP

By EDWARD RONNS

Ambush-bullets and night fires were forging a graveyard out of Stony Creek timber when grinning Steve Douglas sallied in to raise his war-flag there, and dare the lumber-mad killer to blast him out.

IT WAS hot in the heavy timber along Stony Creek. Steve Douglas walked with smooth, even strides over the mossy ground, his body sweating mildly under the pack. It was good to get away from the logging camp, from the everlasting screech of steam from the donkeys, the clatter of the Shay dragging empties, the whine of rigging and the thunder of new drags of logs slamming into the landing alongside the track. It was good to escape the sour smell of crushed bark and sap, the heat and the dust. The cool shade of the new timber received the tall man quietly, and he relaxed in the solemn peace of the woods.

Good timber here, Steve thought. Even today, when he intended to do no more than explore the valley that led to the folded mountains eastward, and maybe fish a little—even now his trained eye took in the lay of the land, seeking proper draws and spar trees among the prime fir and hemlock, searching out strategic locations where the logs would all but come of themselves to the rattletrap railroad.

Sam Tucker, walking beside him, dropped his pack beside a tall cedar and paused for a cigarette. The little rigger ran an appraising eye over the stands of trees on the slope.

"This would be easy," Sam said. "When Kittredge gets the side pushed up here he'll be in the clear. Maybe then he'll get rid of some of his haywire and put in

The shot echoed back and forth. Grady's hat flew off. The two loggers stood frozen.

some decent equipment."

"Hope so," Steve said. "Kitt's nearly broke."

Sam Tucker was a small man, with a young tanned face and feet like a mountain cat. He looked embarrassed for a moment. "Some of the boys talk of quitting, Steve. Pay is overdue, and they say Kittredge will be busted before he ever cuts timber here."

"No, he won't. He'll cut timber or die trying. I know him. You tell the boys to stick it out a little longer, that's all."

Neither said anything for a moment. The trail they followed, a trail begun by the old mountain men over a century ago, angled upward through a gully and came out on a meadowy bench, spangled with clover. Off to the right a stream chuckled, and Steve swung that way, his boots treading smoothly over the soft ground. He didn't mind having Sam Tucker along with him. Sam was just a kid, almost a tenderfoot to this kind of country, but he was a smart rigger and did his work well. There was danger in almost every operation in a lumber camp, and there was even more danger when the outfit working the claim was run on a shoestring, like Kittredge's. The more good men who could be induced to work and stay, the lower the danger point and the fewer the accidents.

The stream came tumbling down a small fall, sliding over limestone, and above that it developed into a series of quiet pools. Steve glanced up at the sun again. Nearly noon, and they had been hiking almost since sunup, when the Chinese cook had fixed them a breakfast and loaded their packs. Just a little farther, and they would rest. There was pleasure in the thrust of his broad shoulders against the pack-straps, in the lift of his long legs that

carried him up the slope of the valley toward the mountains. Now and then he glimpsed the whole spread of land below, the raw white gash of the logged area and the soothing green of new timber.

The little railroad wriggled like a snake down toward the distant lake, glimmering bright in the sunshine. He would glimpse the panorama for a moment, then the woods closed in again, shadowed and quiet. Once he glimpsed a buck and froze, watching the graceful animal at the stream until it suddenly took fright and bounded away. Good hunting here, too. Good fishing, especially. The creek would be full of trout, just waiting for the bright flies in his pack.

A MILE farther on they paused for lunch, on a bank where big cedars towered to clean heights, while on the slopes of the gully tiger lilies and scarlet columbines splashed color on the September grass.

"Wish we could've packed the canoe up here," Sam Tucker said, waving toward the stream. "We'd have saved us a hike."

"Relax," Steve said. "The hike is what I came for."

He was a head taller than the rigger, with thick dark hair and a tanned, lean face that seldom smiled. His eyes were a very dark, intense blue, crinkled at the corners. He seemed at home here in the timber, as if he belonged here, and Sam Tucker had to admit to himself that Steve picked with uncanny skill the proper spar trees and blazed 'em to be spared by the fellers for Sam to rig later and use for yarding logs to the landing.

Steve was young to be that good, Sam reflected. He knew the country like the palm of his hand. Maybe this was Steve's home country at that; but he didn't ask about it because it was none of his business, and it was good to be with the tall man. Steve had a knack of making a trip like this something to remember long afterward with quiet pleasure. It was none of his business if Steve chose to be silent about his past.

There was no hint of danger when they started to fish. If Steve thought about it, he said nothing, pushing the idea from him in the pleasure of the pool. They placed their packs at the foot of a tall spruce and separated, Sam Tucker moving upstream along the bank and out of sight beyond a white, chuckling rapid, while Steve fished the lower pool. There was a slight westerly breeze, downstream, and he was glad to be alone for the hour.

He fished casually, casting the line in long loops that reached the width of the pool, then stepping downstream, recovering the line, bringing the bright fly up at the end of fifty feet of gut, wading into the cold mountain water with his old caulked shoes. He took pleasure in watching the fly go down as the line sank, drawing the lure slowly and deeply back, then straightening the long rod and curving the fly out into the pool again.

The strike was savage, with a wild and impetuous rush that made the reel hum, the line ratchet out. Steve was quiet about it, unhurried, lifting the rod in a smooth curve that checked the fish, his hand sliding to the reel, anticipating every turn and run. The fish jumped, breaking water in a scattering rainbow, and he saw with pleasure that it was twenty inches, at least, shimmering silver in the afternoon light. He coaxed it carefully from the end of the pool brought it past him, led it toward shore. It jumped again, ripping across and away from him——

The shot made him start.

It was a blasphemous, crashing sound, echoing back and forth from the standing timber, shattering the quiet. For a moment Steve forgot the trout, and the wily fish shook hook and fly and vanished. He turned his head upstream toward the pool above the rapids where Sam Tucker was casting.

He couldn't see anything. The shot echoed away through the trees, dissipated on the breeze.

It came again, ripping the afternoon to shreds. A .30-30 carbine, Steve judged, and not too far away. He staked his rod into the bank and climbed up through the brush.

"Steve!"

It was Tucker's voice, sharpened to a high pitch. Steve scrambled over the rocky bank of the rapid and burst into the open

below the pool as the third shot rang out.

This time the bullet whined past his ear, and he saw a sudden white gash appear on a boulder as the slug ricocheted into the nearby firs. A squirrel chattered insanely overhead. Steve paused, looked up at the slopes reaching into the blue sky. There was a crumbling bluff to his right, and on the bench above that a lazy wisp of pale smoke drifted down on the breeze.

"Sam!" he called. "Where are you?"

A crackling came from the underbrush and Tucker exploded into the open. The little rigger's face was white, his eyes hot with amazed anger. He ran toward Steve's tall figure.

"Get down!" he shouted. "Somebody's shootin' at us!"

Another shot cracked spitefully, and before Steve could move he saw Sam suddenly sprawl through the air as if his legs had been yanked from under him. The logger fell headlong, rolling over the gravel bank to the pool. Forgetting danger, Steve plunged through the water toward him, angry blood pounding in his chest.

"Sam . . ."

He threw himself flat behind a rock that sheltered the small man. Sam Tucker's face was twisted with pain. "Some bloody lunatic is popping off at us. The crazy——!"

"Where are you hit?" Steve demanded.

"In my leg. My leg, how do you like that? Now how am I gonna top and rig that Number Three spar? Hell, how am I even gonna make it back to camp?"

"Take it easy," Steve said. "Keep your head down."

"But what's anyone want to shoot at me for?"

"Shut up," Steve said. "Let's see your leg."

He was careful not to expose himself as he examined the wound, but his hands trembled with fury. Sam Tucker in the hospital would be a hard man to replace—there weren't any good head riggers who'd work for a haywire outfit like Kittredge's. But that wasn't all. He looked up at the bluff from where the shot had come, and his dark blue eyes grew darker.

The bullet had gone through Sam's thigh without touching the bone. Dark blood came seeping through his waterproof pants.

"Hurt?" Steve asked.

"Like blazes."

"Use this tourniquet while I go up there and look around."

Tucker said: "He's a nut, Steve. You ain't got a gun."

"He won't use his on me," Steve said grimly.

Something in Steve's voice made Sam look at him sharply.

"Hell, do you know who it is, Steve?"

"Yeah, I know," Steve said. "Stay here. Don't move around."

He gave the little rigger no chance to protest. He was up and on his feet with a cat-like gesture, running long-leggedly up the bank toward the standing timber. Anger pounded in his head as he clambered over a ledge. Up above him, the man with the rifle held his fire. Then he was in the trees, his toes digging into the soft ground under the firs and hemlock. There was a break in the bluff above him, a gully formed by erosion that fanned out in red soil under the trees. Halfway up he paused and stood quietly against the gray bark of a hemlock, listening for any telltale sound of danger.

DANGER was all around him, like a cougar hidden behind a tree stump, waiting in silence to rend his chosen victim. Steve moved again, his steps light and silent, his legs moving with taut control up the eroded gully toward the bench above. Yet for all his caution, he was surprised. The man must have been watching him since he left Sam Tucker at the creek and crossed into standing timber, watching his progress up the slope. Steve was just lifting himself up over the lip of the bluff his shirt dark with sweat, when the voice spoke harshly behind him.

"Stay just like that, mister!"

Steve took his life in his hands and turned slowly. The man who faced him cradled a .30-30 under his arm. He was as tall as himself, but older, almost fifty, with thick white hair and a craggy, vigorous face. Despite the difference in their age, there was a curious resemblance between them as they faced each other across

a taut silence. The rifle was a tangible barrier between them, and Steve didn't move. A wry little smile twisted his lips.

"Put down your rifle, Hungerford," Steve said quietly. "You've done enough damage."

The older man's voice was a harsh, startled whisper. He stared at Steve as if he were seeing a ghost.

"You! You've come back!"

"That's right."

"I thought you were a damn logger."

"I am. So is my friend, the one you shot. Maybe you'd care to explain that."

Hungerford said sharply: "I don't have to explain anything. You were trespassing on my property. I don't allow anyone on my property, and particularly not loggers, damn their guts! Your friend got what was coming to him."

"Suppose it had been me that took the slug?" Steve asked.

The other hesitated. "That's different. But you're a logger, too, you crazy young fool!"

"I like logging," Steve said. "I intend to go on with it."

"But not on my land," the man rasped.

It was strange how alike they were: both over six feet tall, with broad shoulders and powerful legs. They were similar in features, too, with the same square, stubborn jaw and strong flat planes of cheek and brow. But where Steve's eyes were a dark, angry blue and his mouth possessed potential good humor, the old man's eyes were a pale, sun-washed gray, and deep creases of bitterness made his face craggy and hostile. There was an air about the older man of wealth, from his expensive breeches and hunting boots, the green hat on his snow-white head, the careful grooming of his scarf and white, manicured hands.

"Aren't you going to ask about the man you shot?" Steve demanded. "Or has living in your lodge up the hill and having twenty million dollars made you callous about human life?"

Hungerford snorted. "Don't try to frighten me, boy. I didn't kill him. I aimed for his legs and I didn't miss."

"That's right," Steve said. "In his legs where he has to make a living."

"I won't have any loggers on my land! Teach you both a lesson. You can tell Kittredge that I'll aim higher next time if any of his men cross that creek into my property."

"Does that go for me, too?" Steve asked.

Before Hungerford could answer there came a crackling from the brush behind them. A girl stepped into the clearing on the edge of the bench. She was tall, dressed in riding clothes, with a suede vest over her checked shirt. Her face was a clear oval, her dark hair tumbled softly around her slim shoulders, and she moved, Steve thought, with the grace of a deer. But she, too, was armed, with a light .22 rifle, and her dark eyes were puzzled as she came upon the two men.

"Mr. Hungerford!" she exclaimed.

"I told you to wait up there," the old man said impatiently.

"I heard the shots," she said. "I hope you haven't——"

"They're only loggers," Hungerford said contemptuously.

Steve smiled suddenly. "Introduce us. Loggers are human, too."

"Your impudence hasn't lessened, I see," Hungerford snapped. "Get back up the hill, Miss Gray. Stay there until I call for you."

Steve lost his grin. "We're a day from camp. I'll need help packing Tucker to a doctor. He can't walk on that leg."

The girl was pale. "You mean Mr. Hungerford shot——?"

"He doesn't like loggers," Steve said wryly. "He carries his dislikes to extremes. He says he'll kill any who trespass on his precious land, even if it's me."

"I didn't include you, Steve," Hungerford said angrily. "But if you insist on this crazy logging you may expect no hospitality from me."

"I don't expect or want any," Steve said. He ignored Hungerford's rifle. "I'll be seeing you again, Miss Gray."

"I rather think not," she said coldly . . .

II

THE CANOE went sliding downstream, surging forward with each powerful stroke of Steve's arms. Sam was

comfortably placed in the center of the craft, his leg bandaged. Long, slanting shadows fell over the water from the timbered banks, and the sky to westward was bright orange, yielding to deepening purple overhead. An evening hush had come over Timber Valley. They were already miles from the pools they had fished, after a difficult struggle through the brush to where they had cached the canoe.

Steve looked at Sam Tucker's white, pinched face.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Kinda sickish. Guess I lost a lot of blood. But I'd be dead if it wasn't for you," the small man said earnestly. "That was something, packin' me out of there on your shoulders. I'd have died, for all that old man cared. I owe you a lot, Steve."

"Forget it. It was my fault for taking you there. I should have been more careful of Amos Hungerford."

Tucker's face reflected his curiousity. "You knew of him?"

"Yeah," Steve said. "From way back. Timber Valley is my country, you know."

"What's he got against loggers?"

"He hates 'em," Steve said slowly. "He hates every logger in creation. There's nothing we can do about his taking a shot at you, either. We were trespassing, and he was within his legal rights."

Tucker said grimly: "When I get this leg fixed up I'm gonna take some extra-legal rights of my own."

"No, you won't," Steve said. "You can't fight twenty million dollars."

Sam whistled. "If he's got all that why does he live on that forsaken mountain?"

"He owns that mountain, and he's got a twenty-room house up there with all the fixings," Steve grinned.

The little rigger was silent. The murmur of rapids sounded down the creek valley, and for several minutes Steve gave all his attention to the canoe, guiding it expertly along the swift current. The water was deep for another hundred yards, then the stream made an elbow turn and plunged among dark, wet boulders jutting up out of white water. Steve's powerful shoulders bent with each thrust of the paddle as he drove the canoe down the central channel, into a sudden dark wash, and down at a giddy pace through a funnel. The canoe hit flatly on the pool below, splashing spray on either hand. Tucker winced as he gripped the gunwale. The current slackened after a moment and a series of quiet pools lay ahead, misty in the evening shadows.

Sam said: "You know a lot about Hungerford, don't you?"

"I ought to," Steve nodded. "He made his millions out of logging himself, strangely enough. But then his daughter, Anne, visited a camp and there was an acident where they were loading from a cold deck, and she was hurt. Two men were killed, but a cable caught her on the back-whip and snapped her legs. Made her a helpless cripple. Ever since then Hungerford can't stand loggers."

"The girl with him wasn't an invalid, was she?"

"She's Anne's companion," Steve said. "Her name is Jean Gray, as I remember. She doesn't know me, though. I heard about her when I came back to Timber Valley after the army. Hermit Henry told me all about her, mixing it up with all his tales about the valley and county feuds in the old days."

Tucker looked glumly at his legs. "Well, I don't see why Hungerford takes it out on me, just because his daughter Anne got hurt in a logging camp. Something ought to be done about him."

"Don't worry,' Steve said grimly. "Something will be done. Meanwhile, you set your teeth, Sam. I've got to pack you overland to the camp."

It was almost dark when Steve stumbled from the edge of the timber to the railroad grade, passing felled logs trimmed by the buckers. The sky was still light overhead, and it was easier to see when he came into the open. The Shay locomotive was standing farther down the track, hooking on four loads, while half a dozen empty skeleton cars stood on the runaround waiting for the next day's bunkloads. The smell of raw bark and sap filled the air, but the screeching of machinery and steam was ended for the day.

Willing hands took Tucker's little body

from his shoulders and Steve straightened with a sigh, watching two brawny fallers carry him to the crummy at the end of the train. George Olson, the Shay engineer, met Steve as he came down the tracks to the landing around the spar tree.

"Ernie Fallon wants to see you," George said. Fallon was the woods superintendent, next in charge after Kittredge himself. "You're wanted down at headquarters tonight."

"Where is he?"

"In the crummy. Sore as hell over the day's production."

"I'll see him in a minute," Steve said. "I want some coffee if I'm going down the line tonight."

He walked across the barren landing, his mind automatically checking camp conditions. Ernie Fallon was justified in blowing his top. Four carloads of logs represented a drastic slowdown and serious loss for Kittridge, considering the expense of operating the whole side. He could see the whole outfit in his mind's eye, the intricate process of taking timber out of the woods, work that was in his blood for keeps.

His own part, surveying and laying out location for the railroad and estimating timber, was only the beginning. The trackmen and graders followed, gangs of laborers who built trestles and pushed the logging railroad from the mainline at Washburn and the dump on the lake, where the boomers rolled timber into the water, into the claim in the woods.

Then came the fallers and buckers, the riggers trimming spar trees and bracing them with guy wires, setting up block and tackle and cable to yarders that screeched and hauled the felled timber to the landing alongside the track. Fallers, buckers, chokermen and levermen worked with the loaders, big brawny loggers in their sawed-off pants and caulked shoes who worked under the loading tongs—hard, dangerous work for men who liked to live hard and dangerously.

THE camp was quiet now. The windows in the long bunkhouse shone yellow in the deepening night. The logs were all the same dark color now, the red-brown of fir, the silver of balsam and the gray of hemlock blending into the shadows. It was good to get into the boiler room and drink old Mac's scalding coffee and munch a sandwich while the loggers took their hot showers in the stalls nearby.

A warning whistle from the locomotive made him finish his coffee with hasty gulps and stride long-leggedly for the tracks. His body ached with the day in the woods, a day that had promised to be one of leisurely pleasure. Now he felt confused and angry, and there was a grim set to his mouth as he swung up on the tail platform of the crummy. The second brakeman nodded to him and gave the signal, and the train rumbled out of camp, headlight blazing down the grade between the walls of standing timber.

A dozen men crowded the benches inside the crummy, going down the line to Washburn. Steve knew most of them, but two men, obviously fallers, were newcomers on the payroll. They were playing poker by the lantern light, their big hands rough and clumsy on the greasy playing cards, their burly bodies hunched intently forward, smoking, drinking rum, passing time until they hit town. Steve didn't join them. He leaned on the brakewheel on the outer platform, letting the breeze cool his face.

Ernie Fallon came through the crummy and stood beside him.

"That you, Steve?"

"Hello, Ernie," Steve nodded.

"I was hoping you'd made the train. Kittredge wants you at headquarters."

"I got the message," Steve said. He sounded curt and angry, aware that his dislike for Ernie Fallon showed in every word and gesture. "I don't blame the Old Man for being sore. Four skimpy carloads aren't much. A landing like this one ought to shove out fifteen to twenty a day, easily."

"You know what we're up against," Fallon said irritably. He was a big man, with ash-blond hair and a handsome, weather-beaten face. About thirty, Steve judged, with the muscles of a mountain lion and the grace and sure-footedness peculiar to all timberman. Yet Steve knew

that, like himself, Fallon was a university man and wasn't a run-of-the-mill logger like the rest of them. The man knew his business, no doubt about that; but there was the way his eyes never really met yours when he talked to you, and perhaps the neat way he kept his hands, that made Steve instinctively distrust him.

He returned his attention to Fallon's words with an effort. Fallon was saying: "Poor equipment and the scum of the logging camps. Nobody else would sign on a speculative outfit like this. Kittredge is trying to run on bailing wire, with equipment that's dangerous and crews that walk off the job whenever the boys feel like a drink or a girl in town."

"The logs aren't much good, either," Steve said. "Mostly number threes, I noticed. Just good enough for the mill."

"That's not your problem," Fallon said quickly. "Sometimes you talk as if you were the push here, not me."

"Sorry," Steve said. "I just hate to see a good guy like Kittredge go to the wall." He inclined his head toward the crummy door. "Who are the new men in there?"

"Grady and Duncan, fallers. I hired them. Why?"

"I've seen them in logging camps before," Steve said. "They're no good. Bum on the job, and trouble-makers, to boot."

An edge of anger crept into Fallon's voice. "We can't be choosy. We're lucky to get any men to cut logs at all, considering we've already had two killed and another shot today. You stick to your engineering, and let me do the hiring and firing, Steve."

A whistle from the locomotive cut off Steve's reply. He was silent, listening to the echoes bounce back and forth from the hills. The ride was rough, the grade jolting and crude, and he could feel the whole road sway as they crossed a trestle and switched into the main line a mile farther on.

Keep your mouth shut, Steve told himself. It's a job, and you have to eat. You've been away a long time. You're rusty. Only a haywire outfit like Kitt's would have you now. Jobs are tough to get, even if there is a pulp shortage and they need every stick we can haul out of the timber. Nevertheless, despite his own advice, his inner anger smouldered at the growing suspicion that Kittredge, who'd been damn decent to him so far, was being inexorably shoved to the wall by incompetent help and a disloyal crew.

He kept his silence, leaning on the brake-wheel. Occasional glimmers of water shone through the trees as the track edged down to the lake. Fallon was saying:

"So you had a run-in with Amos Hungerford. That was a fool thing to do, you know."

"We were only fishing," Steve said.

"Kitt won't like it just the same. Not just because we lose a fine riggerman like Tucker; but he was trying to make a deal with Hungerford. Antagonizing him the way you did won't help."

"I'll take care of Hungerford," Steve said. "You just run the woods, Fallon."

"I'm just telling you for your own good, Fallon rapped.

Steve looked through the door of the crummy at the two new fallers, big burly men with a stamp of discontent on their faces as they hunched over the poker cards.

"I can take care of myself," Steve said.

Fallon said: "Maybe you'll soon get a chance to prove it."

Turning, the blond man pushed open the door and joined the others inside the car. Steve checked his sudden anger and returned to the rail leaning on the brake-wheel. They were almost into Washburn row. He thought of Jean Gray, the tall girl who had been with Amos Hungerford. He kept thinking of her all the way into town.

III

LAKE STREET in Washburn was a brawling thoroughfare of gaudy bars, restaurants, and clapboard hotels. At night, when the piers and wharves jutting into the water were closed down and yielded to darkness, the boom and tugboat men swarmed down the narrow sidewalks for pleasures that they took as hard as their work.

It was cooler here than in the woods, and the eye rested on a wide vista of water and towering, snow-peaked mountains lifting

to the far horizon. He thought again of his boyhood days in those mountains, hunting with Hermit Henry, and wondered if the old trapper was still alive. There was talk on the sidewalks of the unseasonable heat in Timber Valley, the lack of rain since the August shutdown. Steve threaded his way with long steps through the crowd, towering a head taller than most of the brawny men around him.

Olin Kittredge's office was on a lakefront wharf, a rambling wooden structure with blazing lights in every window. Steve crossed the railroad tracks and pushed open the door. Kittredge was leaning over one of the yellow cedar drafting boards, a green eye shade pushed back on his scalp, his red, round face flushed with worry. Fallon wasn't in sight. Steve closed the door and smiled.

"Hi, Kitt."

"So it's you. Took your time getting here, Stevie."

"I've been in the woods all day."

"So I heard. And Sam Tucker got shot up."

Steve nodded. Ernie Fallon had already gotten his word in, he knew, but he told it over again, quietly, without emotion. Olin Kittredge understood. He was a stout, bald man in logger's clothes, a worn wool shirt and stubbed pants over his botts, a curved pipe between his yellow teeth and blue eyes that were harassed with worry. Steve felt a sudden surge of loyalty toward this grim old logger who was fighting against such odds to build his company into something worth while.

Olin Kittredge sighed and leaned against the drafting table.

"Well, we'll get a new rigger somewhere but it won't be easy. I'll pay Tucker's hospital bills, of course. I already shipped him across the lake on the ferry. He'll be all right. The thing is, every new accident or injury makes it tougher to get new men to work for me. They're mighty leery already."

"There are plenty of loggers in town," Steve said. "Lots of them haven't even looked for jobs since the summer shutdown."

"I know," said Kittredge. "But they don't want to work for me. Those two men who were killed the other week—and now Sam Tucker gettin' shot—it's piling up, Stevie."

"There were only four loads brought in today, too."

"I know that. Ernie says the trainmen didn't get the empties out; one of the trestles needed strengthening, and held up the locomotive until it was safe."

Steve said flatly: "The sticks their cutting aren't any too hot, either. I laid out location in the next draw, you remember. There's halfway decent timber there. But Fallon claimed the grade would be too steep."

"Well . . ."

"There's plenty of good cedar and hemlock up where Sam and I went," Steve said quietly.

"On Hungerford's land?"

"I couldn't help noticing," Steve nodded. "If you could run a spur up Stony Creek and get a set of those logs out, you'd be out of the red, Kitt."

The bald man laughed bitterly. "You're a good boy, Stevie, and a fine engineer. But I've been tryin' my best to get an option on Hungerford's timber. I even looked into his claim and title on the Stony Creek land. There ain't a chance he'll let us set foot in that timber especially after what happened today. I couldn't even see him to talk business."

"Maybe I can make him see it differently."

"And get your pants shot off?" Kittredge grunted. "You'd better stay away from that creek."

"But if you could make a set on that timber," Steve insisted, "you'd be in the clear, wouldn't you?"

"Sure, but I haven't a chance. I appreciate your concern, Stevie; but stick to your surveying. Fallon was complainin' about how you worry more about my troubles than your own."

"To hell with Fallon," Steve said. "I know what I'm doing. If my work doesn't satisfy him——"

"Wait a minute," Kittredge said quickly. "Don't get sore. I ain't payin' much attention to him, even if I did make him woods super. But he's the push out there, Steve. You do what he says."

"If I think it's right," Steve said. A muscle knotted along the line of his stubborn jaw. "Otherwise, Ernie Fallon can jump in the lake with my compliments."

WITHOUT waiting for Kitt's answer, Steve turned and shoved off, quitting the logging office for the cool lake wind on the wharf. The calm night soothed his quick temper, although his sense of frustration, of fighting shadows, remained with him as he turned toward the lights of town. He wondered if he was wrong after all. Maybe his suspicions had no foundation. Maybe he was wrong in coming back to Timber Valley after all these years.

He counted the time that had gone by since he'd left—must be all of nine years, he figured, since his last engineering job with the J & B Timber Company. That outfit had taken him on green, giving him his start. Logging was in his blood, and there was nothing else he wanted to turn to. He had tried not to come back. He had spent a year in California, a restless and miserable year that added up to nothing when it was over, and he had yielded to the mysterious lure of the timber country.

He paused, took a deep breath of the clear, tangy air that blew down from the mountains across the lake. Nerves, he thought. There seemed to be nothing to aim for, nothing a man could set his sights on and work for. Maybe he ought to take a week in the mountains, as he'd done in the old days, and look up Hermit Henry, hunt and fish and lie on his back and watch the clear blue sky. The thought soothed him.

Right now, he decided, he would settle for a drink in Pete's Bar on Lake Street.

He stopped to reserve a room for himself at the hotel, cleaned up, and went across the lobby to the restaurant and bar. The place was full of loggers, men from the woods as well as the boomers and machinists from the mill across the lake. There were booths in the back, and a few of the town girls were there, drinking with the loggers. There were round wooden tables with spindly chairs scattered around the front of the bar. Business was good. A juke box in a corner thumped out a quick, vibrant rhythm. Steve nodded to the barman and ordered rum.

Several of the loggers greeted him, but he avoided an invitation to join a poker game at one of the tables. He wasn't sure afterward when he became aware of the girl and Ernie Fallon. They were in one of the rear booths, and he first glimpsed the girl's dark hair in the bar mirror. Her profile was turned toward him, and he recognized her with a little start. Jean Gray, old Hungerford's secretary. He frowned as he saw Ernie Fallon's ash-blond, powerful head leaning toward her, whispering and smiling. A surge of resentment went through him, surprising him. It was none of his business, Steve told himself, who Jean Gray chose to date when she was in Washburn, and certainly he couldn't blame Fallon for giving the girl all of his attention.

Yet he felt puzzled at seeing them together. Washburn and the Valley were admittedly small, but it seemed more than a coincidence that Ernie Fallon, a woods superintendent, should be acquainted with Jean Gray, secretary to Kitt's enemy. The two didn't belong together.

Steve turned his head to examine the couple more closely, and the girl glanced up and met his gaze. She started, and said something to Fallon. Fallon looked up at Steve and frowned, then shook his head.

The girl said something again, then got up and crossed among the tables toward the bar where Steve stood.

"Mr. Douglas," she said.

"I knew I'd see you again," Steve smiled. "But I didn't expect it to be so soon."

"I'm sorry I didn't know who you were when we met before."

Steve's smile was thin. "Does it make any difference?"

"Of course, I want to apologize for the way I spoke——"

"I'm just another logger," Steve said curtly. "I expect no special treatment from Hungerford or his employees."

"He was very upset. He didn't know you were back in Timber Valley. You should have called on him."

"We don't get along."

"I wish you would, though. He's a sad, embittered man, Mr. Douglas——"

"Call me Steve."

"All right, Steve," she smiled.

NOTHING in his expression revealed the pleasure he had in just looking at this girl. She was lovely, and completely out of place in the rough, rowdy lumber town of Washburn. Her dark hair, almost as black as his own, was braided to form a regal coronet about her head. He hadn't seen or talked to a girl like this in a long time.

Too long, he reflected. He felt suddenly awkward and clumsy before her direct, smiling gaze.

"I do wish you'd come up to the lodge," she said.

He looked at the booth where Fallon waited. The big blond man was scowling.

"Your date is getting impatient," Steve said. "You'd better run along back to him."

She turned pale, as if he had slapped her. "Ernie and I have known each other for some time."

"Has he been up to the lodge, too?"

"A number of times." Her head was proud. "I might add that he doesn't behave like some surly mountain trapper, either."

"Good for Ernie," Steve said grimly. "But I'm surprised that old Amos allows a logger on his private mountain. I should think Ernie's greeting would be a bullet instead of a cup of tea."

"You're just determined to be stubborn," Jean Gray said. "In that case, I'll leave you to your solitude. I seem to be intruding."

Steve didn't say anything. He waited, wanting to speak to her some more, but refraining when he glanced back at Fallon again.

The girl shrugged, turned her back to him, and returned to the booth. Over her shoulder, Ernie's eyes were bitter, full of hate, as he met Steve's grin. Steve finished his drink and went out.

It was after ten o'clock when he picked up his key at the hotel desk and went up to his room on the third floor. It was at the end of the long, dingy hall, comparatively quiet, with only dim sounds of music from the street below. He had no inkling of danger as he opened the hotel-room door and reached for the switch.

The light didn't work. He clicked it futilely several times, then came all the way into the room, feeling in his pockets for a match. The room was as dark as the inside of his coat pocket. The blinds were drawn tightly over the windows. He saw that much——and then someone slammed the door shut behind him. Without warning, a fist smashed out of the darkness, caught him blindingly on the jaw, and drove him backward. His leg touched a chair and he reached for it. His left arm was suddenly pinned to his side in a crushing grip.

A fist slashed at his head from the opposite direction.

Evidently there were two of them, waiting for him here. He could smell the woods on their rough clothing, sense their grappling burly bodies as they came at him in the darkness. He swung a quick right, felt his fist sink lustily into someone's stomach, and heard a sudden grunt of pain. He shrugged his left arm free and reached for the chair again, threw it blindly toward the window. It hit flesh and bone and there came a crash as one of the men went down over the bed. The other lunged at him with flailing, meaty fists.

His back was to the wall, there was no place to go. He swung, felt his knuckles crack on the man's jaw, and took a blinding, pile-driver blow to the head. He had never recovered completely from the surprise of the first assault. He went down to his knees, trying to grapple with his invisible opponent. He had the satisfaction of getting in one more blow, feeling blood spurt over his fist as he broke someone's nose, and then a heavy boot drove into his ribs, and the first man came back off the bed with a wild, savage leap that drove him flat to the floor again.

The breath went out of him as brutal knees crushed into his chest. Steve gasped, rolled sidewise, and yanked at a leg his groping hands encountered. The man went down with a yell. His partner took advantage of the moment to kick Steve in

the ribs again. A deeper blackness engulfed Steve's brain. He lay still, aware of blood coming from his mouth, struggling to draw breath into his lungs.

A man's voice grated: "I guess that will hold him."

The other man said: "Yeah. The—— busted my nose, I think."

"Hell with your nose." A boot prodded Steve's body, but he scarcely felt it. "Hey, Douglas. You hear me?"

"Yeah," Steve whispered.

"That's just a warning. You ain't a logger no more, get it? You ain't workin' for Kittredge no more. You do, and you'll get more of the same. A lot more."

"To hell with you," Steve whispered.

He got his knees under him and suddenly exploded upward, driving big shoulders into the first man's middle. The logger lost his balance and crashed against the door.

The second man tried to reach Steve with a leg of the shattered chair, and missed his murderous aim by inches. Steve got in a right to his face, missed in the darkness with his left. He was on his feet now, staggering after them. But they suddenly had no stomach for further fighting. There were footsteps in the hall, and a sudden babble of voices as the sound of struggle created alarm in the hotel. The door was opened and Steve whirled, glimpsing two big, shadowy figures sliding out of the room.

He didn't try to go after them. He found the light bulb over the bureau and twisted it, and the light came on again. The room was a shambles, battered by the swift violence of the struggle. He didn't look much better. There was a nasty cut on his face, and his whole body ached from the heavy boots that had slammed into him. He sat down on the bed and held his head in his hands for a long moment. His dark eyes grew darker with anger.

He looked at his fists and rubbed blood off his knuckles, then got up on wavering feet and scrambled for a bottle of rum in his pack sack. He took a long drink, just one, and felt a little better. He grinned wryly at his battered reflection in the mirror.

IV

NO ONE commented on his appearance the next day when he returned to the woods, except Joe Ayres, a chokerman working on the landing. Steve offered no explanation to Joe, although he liked the college boy who worked his vacations with Kittredge's outfit. Together with Sam Tucker, Joe and Steve had become a tried and fast trio of friends, fishing, hunting and working together.

"You get in a scrape with Ma Hogan's girls, Steve?" the freckled youngster grinned.

"Something like that," Steve nodded.

"How is Sam Tucker?"

"He'll be fine. Did Ernie get a new riggerman?"

Joe Ayres' face became shadowed. "Yes, he did. Some big bruiser nobody ever heard of before. But he seems to know his stuff. He's working on Number Four spar up the line."

Steve returned to the tracks and walked in that direction. It was good to get back into the woods again. Aside from a reminiscent ache or two, the struggle in the hotel room had left him unharmed. But his smouldering anger wasn't as easily forgotten as the bruises on his ribs. He walked with long, springy strides through the felled timber. The air was filled with clatter of cables and blocks, the hoarse scream of the yarder, the clink of loading tongs. A turn of logs came smashing out of the timber, four prime firs, the ends were raw where the buckers had trimmed them. The turn slid into the landing with a scatter of dust, the chokes were removed and the leverman deftly returned the mainline to the woods. The loaders swung their blue-steel tongs and wrestled the new logs into a bunk load on the empty skeleton cars waiting on the railroad spur.

Steve crossed the track and walked along the ties of the runaround, where six empties waited the locomotive's arrival from down the line. Sharp clanging sounds came from the blacksmith's shack to his right. As he walked, he calculated the number of settings left for the grade—perhaps three more, and then that Number

Four spar. After that they would have to log from cold-deck piles assembled higher up the slope, where the railroad grade couldn't go. But straight up this draw, he remembered, the land permitted the spur to push on toward Stony Creek. Two trestles—maybe three—and they'd be in prime timber. Hungerford's timber. Steve frowned and looked up to where the new rigger was topping the Number Four spar. It was a good tree, and it would stand over a hundred feet clear above the ground. Properly braced with guy wires and rigged to a donkey, they'd be able to clear a fairly decent landing around it.

The new rigger was working fast and efficiently. Steve couldn't see the man's face from the ground. He walked on, his caulks helping him past the track end and over a tumble of felled logs and masses of broken limbs. The sound of axes and saws from the fallers and buckers rang clearly through the humid air. He glanced up at the sun, blazing in a fresh blue sky. No sight of letup in the unseasonable autumn heat.

Steve paused at a stake marked with chalked figures, indicating the preliminary line of the railroad grade, and watched a faller working on a tall hemlock up the slope. As Steve watched, the man, who'd been working casually without haste, dropped his ax, dried his brow, and turned downhill. There was a piece of white court-plaster taped over the bridge of his nose.

The faller whistled sharply, and another man joined him for a cigarette. They were the two new men, Grady and Duncan, hired by Fallon the day before.

Steve walked toward them.

They looked up as he approached and regarded him with blank eyes. Steve made mental notes of their muscular chests, their thickened forearms and heavy hands. There was a sullen tension about their figures as he came up to them and paused. The one with the tape over his nose was Grady. Duncan had a clotted bruise along the ridge of his heavy jaw. It was Grady who suddenly spit into the brush and casually picked up his glittering ax. He leaned on it and met Steve's glance. Steve said:

"I just wanted you boys to know that I'm back on the job."

"What's that to us?" Grady asked.

"How's your nose?" Steve asked. "I thought I broke it for you last night."

Grady hefted the ax in his hand.

"I don't know what you're talking about, mister."

"I'm talking about you," Steve went on. His voice was dangerously quiet. "I'm telling you to pick up your paycheck the end of this week and take a walk."

Duncan, a burly, red-headed man, guffawed.

"Since when are you hirin' and firin'?"

"Since you boys started a little of it yourself."

Grady said sullenly: "Fallon put us on. We ain't quittin' just because you say so."

"This is between us," Steve said. "Remember that. Pick up your paycheck this week and walk."

Grady gripped the ax until his knuckles shone through the pads of dark hair on the back of his muscular hand. Steve stood his ground, outwardly calm, but tense inside. He wasn't sure what might have happened if the sudden hoarse blast of a steam whistle hadn't ripped through the woods just then. The shriek of steam was accompanied by a sudden cracking, metallic sound, as if a giant bull whip had suddenly thrashed through the brush. A man's scream was drowned out in a second shrieking blast of steam. It came from the yarder at the landing.

Grady dropped his ax.

"Hell! Somebody's got hurt!"

Ignoring the fallers, Steve turned his back and raced and slid down the grade toward the scene of the accident. Men were pouring out of the woods from all directions, their faces white and strained. Steve's long legs brought him to the scene quickly.

AT FIRST glance the trouble seemed to be faulty rigging on the spar tree where they had been yarding logs to the landing. The heavy mainline cable had snapped under the strain of hauling a turn of logs out of the brush, and the steel line had lashed back like a deadly snake, catching the loggers by surprise. Released

of its tension, the cable had whipped among them with devastating effect. Two men were motionless on the ground, their bodies limp and crushed. The donkey-puncher was standing with mouth agape, shocked and horrified, his face a pasty white under his tan.

Steve dropped to his knees beside the first man and was relieved to find him still breathing. He might have a broken back, or crushed ribs. There was blood in his mouth. He turned to the second man, arriving with the loaders from the grade. The second victim was Joe Ayres. There was nothing that could be done for young Joe. The back of his head was an ugly, bloody pulp where the cable had smashed his skull. He had died without knowing what hit him.

Steve's face worked as he slowly straightened from the still, tragic figure. The other loggers stood about with curiously angry faces. Several of them carefully lifted the other man in a blanket and carried him toward the railroad. But no one touched the dead boy. Steve watched grimly as Ernie Fallon strode down from the tracks. He didn't wait for the big man to arrive. He turned instead to the donkey-puncher, a gray haired logger from way back, named Curly.

"How did it happen?"

"Honest, Steve, I don't know," Curly said. He was shaking from head to foot, cracking his gnarled hands. "The cable broke."

"Was there too much weight in the turn?" Steve asked.

"I don't think so. We just had four sticks in the chokes. No trouble at all for the donkey. She just snapped, I guess."

Steve looked out along the guy wires from the spar tree. The rigging was a mess, ripped to shreds by the beserk backlash.

"Didn't you have any warning? Was she acting up before this?"

"No, Steve, she was running all right. Honest, I wouldn't take a chance if she wasn't going right. You know that. I been in the woods long enough to know not to take any chances."

"All right, Curly. It wasn't your fault."

SOLID STUFF

The ice of the Arctic Ocean will freeze to an average thickness of 8 ft. in one year, although pressure ridges may form to a height of sixty feet above the surface when winds and currents drive the drifting pack against the land-fast ice.

OLFACTOR KING

The average Eskimo hunter seems to be on a par with the average white man, so far as eyesight, hearing, and every other natural faculty is concerned; but he does seem to excel in the sense of smell. Whether this is due to some anatomical or physiological cause, or is the result of living in an unvitiated atmosphere, is still an unsettled question.

NO BUTTONS

The word "parka" is Kanchatkan, and was brought to Alaska by the early Russian fur traders. The Eskimo name for this hooded, caribou-skin shirt, is attigi *(ah-teé-gee, with a hard "g", and the accent on the second syllable). The parka has no buttons —and therefore no openings through which the wind can reach the body. The hood is trimmed with wolverine, which seems to be the only fur that is not affected by condensation of the wearer's breath. The hood fits snugly about the face, so that if the wearer tightens his belt in cold weather, the parka provides almost perfect insulation to the upper part of the body.*

NEWS!!

When a wolf bites a seal—that is news. Yet it happened on the sea ice off Melville Island. A party of explorers, traveling by dog-team, saw a wolf about half a mile out on the ice. He seemed to be eating something, so they investigated. The wolf made off when they got within a quarter of a mile.

On their arrival, much to their surprise, the party found the body of a seal. From the position of the carcass, and the marks on the ice, it was apparent that the wolf had adopted the role of polar bear, had caught the seal asleep near his hole, and had dragged him about fifteen yards. The wolf had then killed the seal by biting him repeatedly in the throat. And, despite the belief among Arctic trappers that seal blubber is not good wolf bait, this wolf had eaten nothing but blubber.

He turned and met Fallon's grim, pale eyes. The woods superintendent looked shaken. There was perspiration on his face. His eyes had a haunted look.

"There's going to be hell to pay over this."

"More than you think," Steve snapped. "Let's look at the cable."

"Hell, it was an accident," Fallon muttered. "No more than you can expect with the second-hand equipment Kittredge gives us."

Cables don't snap by themselves," Steve said. "I'm going to look."

Fallon accompanied Steve across the landing into the timber. The broken main-line lay like a bitter snake along the ground, in loops and snarls of quietly glistening steel, patched here and there with bright blood. Steve walked along it swiftly, Fallon lagging behind. The end of the cable, lost between tumbled branches, was torn and jagged, with sharp needles of steel thread twisted out of the cords. There was a dull white gash in the metal strands where the cable had parted. Steve straightened with the line in his hands.

Ernie said: "That's where she broke all right."

"She didn't break," Steve said. "Somebody helped it with an ax. Just enough to make it give way after a couple of turns."

"You're crazy! Who'd do a thing like that?"

Steve's blue eyes met Fallon's.

"I thought maybe you'd have some idea."

"You're talking about sabotage," Fallon rasped.

"I'm talking about murder," Steve said. "That kid, Joe Ayres, is dead."

Fallon didn't say anything. His hands shook as he took the broken cable from Steve's fingers. His ash-blond head jerked up and he stared beyond Steve to the landing, then into the timber beyond.

"You don't want to talk like that, Steve. You need better proof than this. Do you know who'd want to do such a thing?"

"I know," Steve said grimly. "And I'm going to get proof."

He left the superintendent standing there and walked slowly toward the railroad. A locomotive had come in, and the loggers were gently easing the man with the broken back into the cab. Joe Ayres lay wrapped in a blanket on the bunk log alongside the track. Steve paused and looked down at the boy's freckled face. He whispered something to himself, then glanced sharply up beyond the timber, where the mountains ranged themselves in jagged masses against the hot, blue sky.

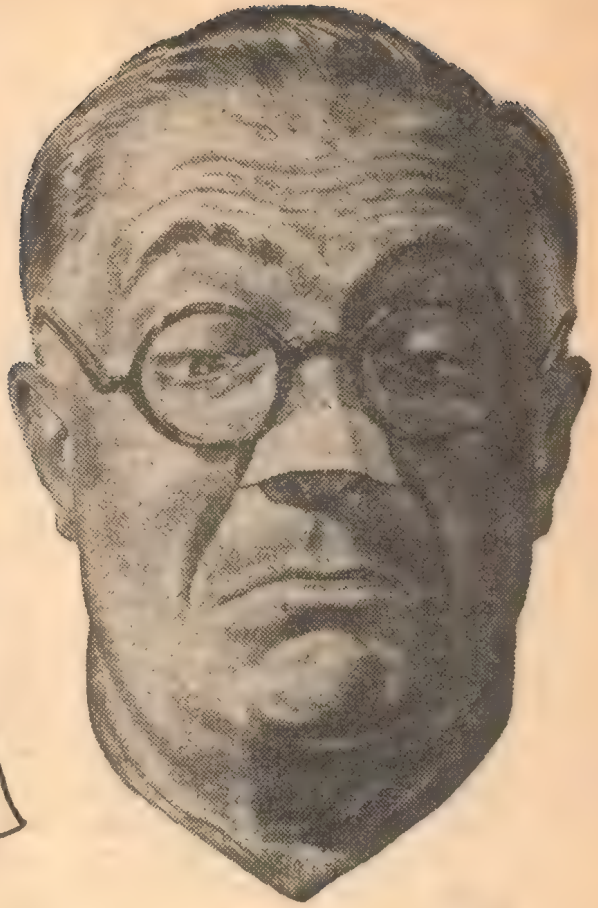
He stared at the mountains for a long time before turning toward the bunkhouse down the line and taking his pack and .30-30 rifle from the locker.

THE Hungerford lodge perched like an eagle's eyrie on the lip of a bluff overlooking Stony Creek. Tall, rich timber stood on the surrounding slopes beyond the immaculate lawn, which out of place in the natural grandeur of the valley. There were no motor roads or railroads within ten miles of the house. Transportation depended on horses, kept in stables behind the house. At the foot of the cliff, however, the wavering line of an abandoned railroad spur made a gash through the green timber, marking the grade where a logging company had once worked. The raw areas of cut timber were almost entirely concealed now by the second growth.

From the wide windows of Amos Hungerford's study, a vast panorama of the valley, even to the lake and a speck of the town of Washburn, could be seen. At nine o'clock on the morning after Joe Ayres' death, Steve Douglas stood at the window and looked down over the land, waiting for Amos Hungerford. He had slept out in the woods the night before, breaking his climb up the valley. His tall figure showed no sign of fatigue. His lean face was grim, his dark hair brushed close to the sides of his head as he turned to face Jean Gray, entering the richly furnished study.

The girl was wearing a light flowered dress.

She looked cool and sweet in the heat that reached up from the valley. She looked wonderful, Steve thought. She was pushing a wheelchair, and the girl in the chair, small and child-like, her legs covered with a light blanket, joined Jean Gray in a welcome smile for Steve.



Memo to a man with a sore nose

Congratulations, sir! Your bandaged beak is a badge of honor!

It's a sure sign that you, like most of us these days, have been keeping your nose to the grindstone—working your hardest just to keep your family living the way you want them to live.

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AUTOMATIC SAVING IS SURE SAVING—U.S. SAVINGS BONDS

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He turned slowly, his face saying nothing.

Jean Gray said: "I told Anne you were here. It made her very happy, Steve."

"Hello, Anne," Steve said.

"You've been away from us for a long time," said the girl in the wheel chair. "I'm glad you've come to see your Uncle Amos at last."

"It's a matter of business," Steve said. "I didn't come here as a repentent nephew. I have nothing to repent. Logging is in the family blood and I don't intend to give it up." He saw the pain in the invalid girl's eyes and added: "I'm sorry, Anne. I just don't think Uncle Amos is reasonable about his hatred for loggers. Your accident wasn't anybody's fault."

"Oh, I don't mind that," Anne said. "I've tried to talk Dad out of his hatred for loggers but it doesn't help. I don't share his feelings in the matter, believe me, Steve. Anything I can do to make you welcome in this house——" She smiled wanly and shrugged. "I know all about your attitude, too. I don't blame you for quarreling with Daddy after your mother died. But you are our only living relative. You're my only cousin, Steve, and I do wish you'd end this quarrel with Daddy about logging."

"I'd have come up before to see you, Anne," Steve said. He looked at Jean and smiled. "But if any of the loggers I work for knew, or even suspected that I was Amos Hungerford's nephew, I'd be out of a job like a shot."

Jean said nothing. Looking at her, Steve thought again that she was the loveliest girl he'd ever seen. It was strange, returning to this big, wealthy house where he had packed up and hiked off into the woods to Hermit Henry, while the police of seven states searched for him as a missing person. Then he had gotten that job with the J & B Timber Company, and Amos Hungerford had tried to hound him out of the job, pursuing him with his hatred for the loggers who had crippled his daughter Anne. Steve shook himself slightly to rid himself of the memories crowding his mind.

"I'd like to see Uncle Amos now, if I may," he told Jean.

He was in the library. Steve could see the resemblance between Amos and himself as the tall, silver-haired man greeted him from behind a huge, kidney-shaped desk. At his back was a window opening on a shimmering vista of Timber Valley, baking in the September sun.

"Sit down, Steve. Make yourself comfortable. This is your home, you know, if you'd only be sensible." His pale eyes were annoyed as Steve remained standing. "I trust you've decided to be reasonable and stop meddling with those damn loggers."

"On the contrary," Steve said. "I'm not staying long. I'll be leaving as soon as I've had my say to you. What I came for is to tell you to stop interfering with the Kittredge company."

"Interfering?"

Steve's voice tightened. "You know what I'm talking about, Uncle Amos. I don't know how much of what has happened is your fault, but I'm sure you've had something to do with it. I can't prove what I know, not to the satisfaction of a coroner's jury, but you're responsible for murder!"

Amos lunged up from his chair, white with rage.

"Murder? Are you crazy, Steve?"

"You've been behind all the accidents that happened in the Kittredge camp. I didn't suspect it until I learned that Fallon, the superintendent, has been a frequent visitor here."

Hungerford stared at him. "Fallon? He comes to see Miss Gray, that's all."

"Maybe that's what he tells Jean. But he's in your pay, and his job is to hamstring Olin Kittredge. I know you have no personal reasons against Kitt, particularly. It's just your hatred for all loggers that makes you drive every outfit out of the valley. But you've gone too far this time. One of the accidents you engineered killed a boy yesterday morning. I know it was no accident, though, even if I can't prove it. I just came up here, Uncle Amos, to warn you to lay off. Otherwise I'll see that your part in it is exposed."

Amos Hungerford's big hands, still showing traces of the logging he had done

MURDER

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in his youth, were trembling as he leaned on the desk. His face looked haggard.

"Steve, you're wrong. I never ordered any phony accidents. I never wanted anybody to be killed. I won't listen to such accusations in my own house.

"I didn't come here to quarrel with you, Uncle Amos. I just came to warn you, that's all."

"You're an impertinent young fool! Get out!"

V

STEVE didn't move. Under Amos' anger he saw that the man was shaken, trembling with more than rage. He said: "Maybe the men you hired to needle Kittridge took it on themselves to do a more enthusiastic job than you asked for. I don't say you asked for any man's death, but you know Kittredge has his back to the wall. He's trying to do a patriotic job; the country needs every square foot of lumber it can get, for paper and housing. I should think it's time you forgot an accident that happened fifteen years ago and put aside your prejudices, Uncle Amos. Let Kittredge get his timber out. Better yet, lease him the Stony Creek claim and let him log it this season."

"The Stony Creek claim?"

"There's good timber there," Steve said. "I've surveyed it myself. Kittredge needs that claim."

"He won't get it from me!" Hungerford snapped. "You must be crazy, first telling me I'm a murderer, and then asking me to lease my land to a logging outfit! Stony Creek is part of this mountain, and Kittredge won't get a square foot of it while I live!"

"All right," Steve said quietly. "I just asked. Part of this land belongs to me, you know—through my mother."

"It's in trust until you're forty!" Hungerford said. "Until then, I decide what's to be done with it. If you're all through making your crazy accusations, you can leave."

"What are you going to do about Fallon and the hoodlums you hired to wreck Kittredge's company?"

"Nothing!" Hungerford snapped. "Get out!"

Steve shrugged and left without another word. His hat and pack were in the big entrance hall. He hesitated a moment there, wondering if he'd been wrong, after all, in trying to beard Uncle Amos without better proof. He was sure of one thing, anyway. Amos hadn't known about the last accident, and if he was behind the sabotage, he hadn't intended anything as violent as murder. Amos' methods would have been on the financial level, withholding bank loans and deflating Kitt's shaky credit. But not murder. Not even with all the violent hate the old man had for loggers.

He was about to quit the house when he heard quick footsteps behind him, and Jean Gray appeared from the shadowed study.

"Steve!"

Her eyes were filled with disappointment.

"I heard your quarrel with Mr. Hungerford," she whispered. "I'm sorry. Does that mean you're not coming back?"

"Does it make any difference?" he asked.

"Well, I——"

"If I do come back," he said gently, "it will be because of you. Remember that."

Her eyes smiled. "I hoped you would say that, Steve."

"I have a lot to say," he nodded. "But it will have to wait for another day."

Her eyes were warm and dark upon him. "Make that day come soon, Steve."

He made speed returning down the valley, disdaining the road beyond the next ridge and climbing down the crumbling bluff to the abandoned railroad at its base, where he struck off along the hemlock ties. Much of the old logging equipment had been abandoned to the elements when financial disaster, guided by Hungerford's enmity, swept the company out of existence. But the old railroad grade made a quick and easy path down the valley toward Washburn.

Five miles of winding through the timber brought him to a Y in the spur, where the camp tracks joined what had once been the mainline to Washburn. He followed the new spur, heedless of the sultry heat that brooded over the woods. The old

trestles, he noted, were still sturdy enough to support a string of timber cars. Another five miles, while the sun sank lower in the woods, brought him to an old junction with Kittredge's line, where he paused to drop his pack and sit for a while, resting with his back against a tall fir.

HE DIDN'T have long to wait. Down the brooding, heat-filled gap in the trees came the Shay's mournful whistle, and he watched the rails vibrate under the weight of the load coming down the line toward Washburn. Steve walked to the center of the tracks and signaled until Barney Olsen, the engineer, brought the locomotive to a stop and let him swing aboard.

"You sure pop up at the damndest places," Olsen grinned, pushing the johnson bar forward. It was hot as a furnace in the cab of the 40-ton Shay. "Kittredge wants you again—same old story. You seem to be sticking your neck out lately."

"That's all right," Steve said. "I'm looking for Kitt."

"I wouldn't hurry. He just wants to fire you."

"What for?"

"I reckon he'll tell you why himself, in plenty."

Olsen was right. Kittredge was waiting for him in the wharf office in Washburn. It was almost evening when Steve arrived there, still wearing his logger's clothes except for his caulks, now stowed in his pack and exchanged for a pair of oxfords. Ernie Fallon wasn't in the office. Steve pushed past the drawing tables and entered the only lighted room in the place, Kitt's private office. The boss logger didn't waste any time on Steve.

"Your check is paid up to the end of the week, Douglas. Maybe I should've made it out to your real name. Hungerford, ain't it?"

Steve said wearily: "No, Kitt—my name is Douglas, all right. But it's true Amos Hungerford is my uncle. How did you learn about it?"

"He telephoned me, himself—told me who you were. That's good enough for me. I'm not hiring any Hungerford's."

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Steve said patiently: "Look, Kitt, I went up there today to try to talk some sense into the old man and get him to lease you the Stony Creek claim. I also figured he was behind the accidents we've been having. I can't prove anything, but I'm sure Fallon and some of the men he's been hiring have been ganging up on you to slow up production."

Kittredge's round head shook savagely in denial.

"I sent Fallon up to Hungerford to talk business! If anybody around camp is guilty of sabotage, it's you, slipping into my outfit without lettin' on who you really are!" Abruptly the old man's voice softened. He looked down at the check on his desk. "I liked your work, Steve. You know this country and its timber, and you do survey work better'n most engineers. But I can't take any chances on more accidents. I know you and Ernie don't get along—he was givin' me an earful of the same story you told me, except it was twisted around to put the blame on you. I don't rightly know the truth of it but I can't gamble on you any more. You're fired."

"But don't you see," Steve said, "that's just what Amos wanted you to do when he telephoned about me. He wants to hound me out of the logging industry just as he wants to get every logging outfit out of Timber Valley."

"You may be right," Kittredge said, "but I can't be certain. There nothing more to say, Steve. You can pick up your equipment in camp tomorrow morning. That's all."

Steve had no further arguments. His pride, that crazy, hot-headed pride inherited from a long line of northwest pioneers, cut off the protests in his mind.

No one spoke to him on the trip back to camp the next morning, nor did he see Ernie Fallon in the camp office or in the bunkhouse when he collected his things. His surveying instruments were packed and shipped back to town with Olsen on the Shay. But he selected one of his fishing rods and kept his .30-30 carbine and took a full pack sack when he struck out of camp. The Chinaman in the cookhouse gave him a full breakfast and enough coffee and beans to keep him for days, although he knew he could live on game in the woods indefinitely, if need be.

He had no heart to return to Washburn and take the river boat on the lake down to the coast. It was the mountains at the head of the valley that called him, the peace and quiet of the timber and the hunting of wild goat, deer and bear high up on the timber-line on the rocky, snow-covered slopes.

It wasn't in the sense of running away that he turned his long steps toward the rising hills. He had a thought in mind, a slim hope for something that might vindicate him. Something he remembered from his boyhood, which Hermit Henry, if the old man was still alive in his cabin up there, might be able to help him with.

He was a woodsman born, and some of the serenity and peace of the quiet timber crept into him as he hiked up the draws to higher ground. Once clear of the logged area, he saw plenty of signs of game—deer and rabbit, grouse and wild duck.

It wasn't until noon, however, that he realized he was being followed.

He had paused along the upper reaches of Stony Creek, and was frying trout over a small fire, when he caught a glint of metal in the sunlight on the leafy slope to his right. Metal on a gun barrel, pointed at him!

His move was instinctive, his legs driving his long body aside, sliding flat behind a rocky ledge. When he looked up again, there was nothing to be seen but the peaceful green and gray of cedar and hemlock. Yet he hadn't been mistaken. He looked at his crackling fire, at the trout, and his pack leaning against a small rock.

The slope above was silent, shimmering faintly in the noonday heat. After a moment he got quietly to his feet and moved with the stealth of a pioneer mountain man, slipping from cover to cover as he advanced up the grade. He made no sound. He heard nothing except the call of a jay and the chatter of a squirrel. He was puzzled, unwilling to believe that Amos Hungerford would attempt his life again. He skirted an outcropping of granite and came out on the ledge where he had seen the glint of the rifle.

ON THE soft turf behind the ledge were the sharp imprints of caulked shoes. Loggers! There were two pair of prints, two men, and he could see where one had sprawled flat on his belly, covering the approach along the creek where he had fished for his lunch.

They were stalking him, no mistake about it. Not with the clear signs here, where they had lain in ambush. Yet they hadn't fired—perhaps because of that momentary glimpse of the rifle he'd had, and his quick leap to cover. They were somewhere around here. He felt his pulses begin to pound, and warned himself against any panicky move. His eyes slid along the trail of caulks in the turf. The two men had hastily retreated when he started up the slope, but they couldn't be far off, lurking in the timber, perhaps maneuvering for a more effective position from which to murder him.

From being the hunter, he suddenly found himself to be the hunted, and he smiled wryly at the thought of being someone's quarry. He hadn't been born and raised in Timber Valley for nothing.

He moved now with stealth and caution, sliding away from the ledge and circling wide along the lip of the fold, edging down to the creek on silent feet. The trail of his pursuers quickly faded out on the needles underfoot. His camp equipment and pack —and particularly the .30-30—were intact. He slid the pack straps over his shoulders and carried the carbine in his hand as he carefully extinguished the fire, kicked sand over the embers, and proceeded on up the creek valley. Instead of following close to the bank, however, he took to the wooded slopes, striding silently through the dark and shadowy timber.

At two in the afternoon, miles beyond the pools he had fished with Sam Tucker, he glimpsed his pursuers for the first time. Once he heard them, moving clumsily through the brush behind. Another time he came across their trail ahead of him as they circled around at a faster pace. Steve neither hurried nor slowed down. He finally saw them for a moment, crossing a log jam farther up the creek—two

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burly figures moving with cat-like, logger's feet across the fallen timber to the opposite bank. Steve paused in the shadows of a tall fir and grinned softly.

The two men stalking him were the fallers, Grady and Duncan. He had just the briefest glimpse of them before they melted into the woods, but he wasn't mistaken. His blue eyes grew thoughtfully sober, and he weighed the .30-30 meditatively in his hand.

It would be a simple matter to kill a man, here in the wilderness, and bury his body. When the snows came, there would be no trace of the deed. And by next spring, the victim would be beyond recognition—if, indeed, he was ever found.

He had kept to his own side of the creek, which was now just a tumbling rivulet of white water. The ascent was steeper, and the air a little cooler as he climbed out of the hot, sultry valley floor along the first folds of the mountains ahead. There were more frequent outcroppings of raw, weathered rock, and the gracious height of the tall firs grew less as he climbed. He was crossing a flat ledge of exposed granite circling a waterfall in the creek, when the shots were fired.

The first bullet cracked past his ear like the whine of an angry bee, splattering on a boulder beyond him. The second shot followed, smashing the quiet solitude as he flung himself flat. The bullet passed through the air where he'd been a moment before. He didn't linger where he was now. He felt as exposed as a fly on a window pane, on that barren ledge. He got his legs under him and suddenly sprinted. A third shot kicked up a spurt of gravel under his feet. He flung himself into a narrow crevice in the gray granite.

He caught his breath, shaking off his pack straps for greater freedom, and then surveyed the land. At his back, the bluff rose in sheer walls to a hundred feet or more, broken only by the waterfall and another notch to his right. Below him, over the edge of the bench he had been crossing, was green timber. For a moment he glimpsed a man's shirt moving through the foliage, then he saw the man rise and run in a stooping position to the next tree, carrying a rifle in his hand. It was Grady, the faller, who had threatened him with an ax. Steve raised his rifle, then held his fire. This wasn't the time.

VI

TWISTING about carefully to avoid exposure, Steve found that the crevice in which he sheltered extended upward in a notch parallel to the one farther down. He knew what lay beyond—he knew the country like the palm of his hand—and a sudden grim smile touched his lips. He turned back and watched the woods below the bench. When he again saw a flicker of movement from the two men down there, he rose to his feet and quickly withdrew up the crevice, climbing among the tumbled rocks into an ever-narrowing alley between the walls of the bluff. There was a need for haste, and a greater need for silence. Once his foot slipped as he went up the ascent, and a shower of rocks rattled downward on the spot where he had hidden. But there was no alarm from his pursuers. He continued to climb.

The top of the bluff didn't end his climb. The land grew abruptly wild and rugged, rising in steep folds and benches cut by the notch he followed and the one to his right. His hands were raw and bleeding in another five minutes, and carrying his rifle increased his danger of a fall with every new toehold. His shirt was plastered to his back with sweat when he finally paused to rest. His muscles quivered.

There was no timber here, and he realizel that since dawn he had come up thousands of feet. He was close to the timber line at this one point, although other arms of the wood reached up much higher on the mountain. The next hundred feet above him, however, was a desolate tumble of rock and jagged pine and brush. There was no other way to make the ascent except through the notch he had followed and the other one. Steve grinned tightly, straightened on a little flat, and clambered across a rock fall toward the other notch. The minutes ticked by perilously fast. He didn't know if he would be too late or not. He realized now that he had counted on this place ever since his first glimpse of Grady and Duncan. This was the place,

if any, to turn the tables.

He crept forward over the edge of the second notch and looked over. The break in the ground was a jagged gash caused by erosion and landslide, a narrow gap in the wall of the bluff similar to the one he had climbed. Fifty feet down the funnel was a narrow bench, clearly visible from where he lay. Steve eased his carbine forward, worked the lever, and pumped a shell into the magazine. He edged his shoulder into position, sighted along the V, and waited. Somewhere water tinkled, and a hawk suddenly swooped overhead in a long arc, its shadow rushing silently over the gray rock. It was hotter here than in the sheltering timber. Sunlight shimmered and danced in little heat waves before his eyes. Steve rubbed his face with the palm of his hand and settled down again.

He didn't have long to wait.

There came the sound of caulks on rock, slipping and grabbing, then two heads appeared up the notch, climbing toward him. Steve gripped the rifle tighter, waiting. Grady and Duncan reached the bench fifty feet below him. Steve squeezed the trigger.

The shot echoed back and forth. Grady's hat flew off. The two men stood frozen.

"Drop the guns!" Steve called.

He could see them peering around the narrow walls of the funnel that squeezed them into the trap. There was no place for them to go.

"Drop 'em!" Steve called again.

They complied, reluctantly, their rifles clattering to the rock on which they stood. Grady, the smaller of the two, saw Steve first as he rose to a standing position.

"Get up here," Steve said. "Leave the guns."

Their faces were sullen and deflated as they clambered slowly up the funnel toward him. Steve held his carbine cradled under one arm. His lean, dark figure towered over them as they finally crawled, panting, over the lip of the bluff before him.

"We ain't done nothin'!" Grady blurted. "What's the idea takin' a shot at us?"

"I was only returning the compliment,"

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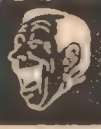

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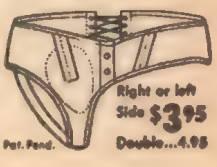

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Steve said. His voice was quiet, but grim. "Who sent you here to knock me off?"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about!" Grady said.

"Was it Fallon?"

"Find out for yourself! You got nothing on us, Douglas. You can't prove anything."

Steve nodded and turned to the bigger, red-headed Duncan. "What about you? You have anything to say?"

"The hell," Duncan spat. "We was shootin' at a deer."

"That's right," Grady said. "A deer. I'm going down and get my rifle."

"Try it," Steve said quietly. His voice suddenly halted the smaller man as he half turned back to the funnel. Grady's voice became a whine. "Well, what're you goin' to do with us? Pack us back to town? The sheriff will laugh his pants off if you tell him what happened!"

"Not to town," Steve said. "Up in the hills." He eyed the sun sinking in the west. "I guess we can make it to Hermit Henry's before dark. I've got a little score to settle with you fellows for what happened in the hotel the other night."

It was Duncan who took the chance, perhaps moved to desperation by the quiet danger in Steve's voice. The big man lunged for Steve's riflle.

Steve's right crossed with a swift, lethal blow that smashed knuckles into the faller's jaw. Duncan stumbled forward and went to his knees. At the same time, Grady took courage and leaped for Steve. Steve retreated another step, swung his right again. This time hampered by his carbine, he missed, and Grady drove a hard brutal fist into Steve's face. Steve stumbled backward another step, felt his boots suddenly tread on crumbling gravel, and fell quickly forward to one knee. Grady's caulked shoe swung in a vicious kick for the head.

Steve grabbed at the man's leg and yanked. Grady howled and went down, scrambling away, his face suddenly bloody as his head slammed into a rock. Steve whirled, prepared for Duncan's return to the fight—but the big man had evidently been quieted by Steve's one blow. He was sitting upright, holding his jaw. He spat out a tooth on the ground and cursed.

Steve stood up and moved away from the perilous edge of the bluff. He took a deep, ragged breath.

"Now I reckon you two will behave," he said quietly. He gestured with the rifle. "Get moving."

HERMIT HENRY'S cabin was at the end of a rambling miner's trail, snugly built in a little copse of pines, with walls of roughly hewn timber and a little porch and garden in the back. The old mountain man showed no surprise when Steve herded his two prisoners through the evening dusk, up the trail to his cabin. He grinned and sent a stream of tobacco into the brush and said:

"Come back fer a little visit, Stevie? It's been a long time."

"I started out to do some hunting and fishing," Steve said. It was good to see Henry again. "These two wanted to plant me."

"What fer?"

"That's what I intend to find out."

Hermit Henry chuckled into his beard, ran old gnarled fingers through his long white hair, and said: "I reckon we could find accomodations for 'em both. We'll bed 'em down good and snug in the backroom until they loosen their jaws. They can't get out of that back room nohow." The old mountain man's leathery face was shrewd as he peered up at Steve's tall figure. "You changed some, boy. Was it the army? Or ain't you loggin' any more?"

"I don't know," Steve said. "I'll tell you about it over dinner."

Dinner consisted of fish, deer steak, and potatoes fried in bear fat, and coffee laced with rum. Nothing had changed with Hermit Henry since his last visit, years and years ago. There was the same old buffalo head on the wall—a long story of inheritance from Henry's pioneer dad—the old long rifles and powder horns over the fireplace, and the rough double-decker bunks against the log wall. The mountain man listened with bright eyes as Steve briefly told him of the trouble down in the valley, concluding with Grady and Duncan.

Hermit Henry turned to glance at the bolted door to the back room. His

wrinkled face broke into a grin.

"I can take care of them two timber-wolves," he said. "I can keep 'em here until hell freezes over, if need be. Plenty of time 'fore I get to see the sheriff. But that ain't going to set things right between you and Kittredge. The way it appears to me, a claim on old Amos' timber is the only thing that'll keep Kitt from goin' bust. But he might as well try to toss a boom log over Pike's Peak—he'd have a better chance of succeedin'."

"I don't know," Steve frowned. "Henry, you know the history of Timber Valley better than any man alive. You were here long before Uncle Amos built that wacky estate out in the middle of nowhere."

He poured another cup of coffee from the battered pot.

"What I'm getting at," Steve went on, "is the land rights along Stony Creek. You were telling me once, I remember, that back in the '80's Stony Creek was a county boundary."

"Sure, Stevie, I recall all about that. Matter of taxes come up when they was tryin' to get silver out of this old mountain, and some smart legal fellers got engineers to prove the county line wasn't where folks thought it was. They didn't get nowhere, though."

"But for a while Stone Creek was under the jurisdiction of Haines County, instead of Washburn, wasn't it?" Steve persisted.

The mountain man's aged eyes twinkled.

"What are you gettin' at, Stevie?"

"Well, Kittredge said he searched all the claims to prove Amos Hungerford had no right to the Stony Creek land. It seems there was a slight chance it belonged to the land company that leased him his present claim. But one thing sure. I'll bet nobody ever thought to look over in the Haines County courthouse to see if any old records are still there!"

Henry chuckled and poured a liberal dose of rum into his coffee.

"You got something, Stevie! No question about it, they got records in the Haines courthouse while there was that boundary dispute. But I wouldn't be sure it'll show what you want."

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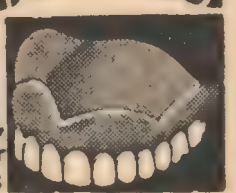

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"It's worth looking into," Steve said.

"You bet your caulks it is! And as for them two skunks in the back room, you just leave 'em to me while you make your trip. I'll run 'em over to the sheriff or over the mountains, dependin' on how I feel tomorrow morning." The white-haired man slapped his thin knee with sudden glee. "It sure would be one on your Uncle Amos, gettin' that timber away from him! I'd like to see the old boy's face when he hears you done it!"

"I haven't done it yet," Steve said grimly. "But I'm going to start tomorow." . . .

IT WAS a week later when Steve, standing in the bow of the little river steamer, saw the town of Washburn again, across the lake. He stood alone, tall and lean, wearing a new suit and boots and a new hat. Inside the suit, in a large legal envelope, he carried certified photostats of papers collected in Haines County that made him smile a moment. Quick dismay filled his blue eyes as he stared across the glittering lake to the logging town of Washburn and the timber beyond. A swift down-curving of his mouth wiped out the pleasure he had in seeing the valley again, and a word that was the nemesis of all loggers began to beat through his brain.

Fire.

Timber Valley was on fire.

He could see the smoke from the deck of the river steamer. It hung in a low, ominous cloud above the timber beyond Washburn, an obscene gray curtain that defiled the blue sky. Heavy atmospheric pressure kept the smoke from rising very high, but his quick eyes measured the mushroom growth and swiftly placed its source in a long, ravaging line across Kittredge's claim and into the Hungerford mountain.

In a way, Steve had been expecting it. Ever since the late-summer rains failed and logging began, the weather had been hot and dry and oppressive. It was a wonder it hadn't started before this. He tested the wind that blew across the lake, and cold apprehension gripped him. The wind was enough to set the blaze leaping over normal fire trails, if it needed any help at all.

Steve gripped the rail until his hands hurt. Behind him, he could hear the other passengers gathering on deck, talking as they watched the smoke. Someone laughed and said: "Well, old Kitt's troubles are over, anyway! He'll never get that little blaze out in time to save his claim."

The little steamer seemed to crawl like a waterbug over the surface of the lake, chugging along for endless minutes toward the Washburn wharves that never seemed to come any closer. Then they were nosing into the bank and Steve tossed the line to waiting hands and leaped ashore, turning toward Kittredge's wharf.

The past week had wrought changes in Olin Kittredge. Steve found the boss logger slumped in his office chair, staring with faded eyes at nothing at all. The fat man's face looked slack with defeat. He was alone in the office. He scarcely moved as Steve's tall figure suddenly filled the doorway.

"Kitt!" Steve said bluntly. "Why aren't you out in the woods saving that timber?"

Kittredge shook his head wryly. "Hello, Steve. I was wondering if you'd show up."

"What are you doing about the timber?" Steve repeated harshly.

"All I can, Steve. But it's no use. The damn thing started so suddenly, after all these hot, dry days, that the boys just got out of camp with the clothes on their backs. It's sure got me beat, son."

"You're not licked," Steve said urgently "Don't talk like that. We can stop the fire on your claim and even if you do lose some timber around camp you've still got Stony Creek to log!"

"Stony Creek? That's Hungerford's land."

"No, it isn't," Steve said. He grinned and took the packet of legal documents from his coat pocket. "Where do you think I've been for this past week?"

Kittredge shrugged. "I figured you went to the coast when I fired you. I'm sorry about that, Steve. I'd take you on again and apologize for losin' my temper, if I had any claim left to log. But this damn fire——"

"You've still got a claim," Steve insisted. "Look at these papers!" He snapped the envelope open and spread the

photostats on the stout man's desk. His words were swift, eager and jubilant as he told of their discovery in the adjacent county, and the mountain man's story of boundary strife along Stony Creek. As he talked, Olin Kittredge sat up a little straighter, and a dim spark of fight returned to his faded eyes. Steve finished: "Amos Hungerford never had a legal claim to that strip of land, and since it's adjacent to the claim you leased, worded to take in all the land up to Hungerford's property, this means that Stony Creek is yours!"

Kittredge abruptly slumped back again and shook his head.

"It's no good, Steve. It was a good try, and I thank you for it. But the fire's there, too. There's a clear belt of fire across both claims."

"What have you done to fight it so far?"

"The usual things. Cut fire lanes, and ran some hoses down to the stream. The boys had no chance to start a back fire at the camp—the whole shebang went up like a firecracker, as I said. Lost the yarder and a dozen flat cars and all the cold decks the fallers were piling up. They backed down the grade three miles and cut a new fire lane there, and some of 'em are tryin' to circle around toward Stony. But this wind is more than they can handle."

"Where is Ernie Fallon?"

"He's out tryin' to save what equipment is left."

Steve frowned, and a momentary silence filled the office. Kittredge still looked defeated. The lake water slapped at the piling under the wharf. Then Steve heard the familiar hoot of the Shay locomotive from the tracks nearby, and his face tightened with new determination.

"Kitt, are you sending out any more men?"

Olin nodded. "I called the locomotive in to take some volunteers into the woods. But it won't do any good."

"I'm going with them," Steve said promptly. "You need every hand you can get."

"Sure, Steve. Go ahead. Take charge of 'em, too, if you want to."

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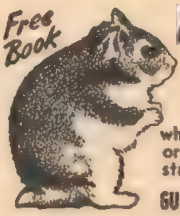

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VII

FORTY minutes later, the Shay engine and a crummy crowded with volunteer fire-fighters clicked over the expansion joints at the Y in the mainline and rattled into the logging spur toward the Kittredge camp. Steve was in the cab with Olsen and the fireman. A flat car, hastily coupled to the nose of the locomotive, rattled ahead of them, carrying a bulldozer and hasty coils of hose. The hot, choking smell of burning timber filled the air. They rattled over a trestle, where a gang of graders were clearing out brush from the gully beneath, and began the long climb upgrade.

Olsen's face was grim as he looked toward Steve.

"They say two of the trestles up the line are gone already. This fire's moving pretty damn quick. You should've seen the way it took the camp—like a bomb, Steve. I never seen one start like that before, even if it has been fire weather."

Steve nodded, squinting from the cab window at the grade ahead. The smoke was thicker now, and in the dense timber the temperature seemed to climb with each revolution of the Shay's geared wheels. Steve glanced at his watch and was surprised that it was only ten in the morning. The locomotive lumbered on, deeper into the woods. In ten more minutes they passed the old Y where the rusted, unused spur curved off through the woods toward the Hungerford estate—the same spur line Steve had used on his hike back from his visit to Uncle Amos. The smell and taste of the forest fire was thicker now. They passed a spot blaze, started by drifting sparks lifted by the updraft and carried far in the air beyond the emergency fire trails. Steve was relieved to see a gang of loggers already attacking it. A glowing cinder flew in the cab window, and he stamped it out on the steel floor plates.

Olsen said: "One gets you ten we don't make the next trestle."

The engineer was proved right in a matter of minutes. The smoke grew thicker, stinging Steve's eyes and burning in his throat. The Shay clicked around a long bend in the rails and Olsen suddenly reached for the brake lever. Ahead of them, a logger was wagging desperate signals from the right-of-way. Beyond the man's figure was a brutal burst of flame, roaring and crackling spitefully above the pound of steam in the locomotive's valves. It was the last trestle, going up in a wild blaze of exploding timbers. Across the little gully, the forest was a wall of living fire, breathing an inferno of heat that made Steve wince. A group of loggers ran across the track ahead of them, dragging hose toward a spot fire on the near side of the gully.

Steve leaped to the ground before the Shay grumbled to a halt. From the crummy poured the volunteers from Washburn.

It took several minutes to sort out the confusion among the loggers and learn who was in charge of operations. It turned out to be a thick-set hooktender named Keene. Steve located him along a newly cut fire trail that paralleled the lip of the gully. Keene's shirt was charred and smouldering in half a dozen places, and the man's hair and eyebrows were singed gray by the heat. His sweaty face was smudged with a layer of dust and smoke as Steve shouted to him above the maniacal roaring of the fire across the gully.

"Where's Fallon?"

"Gone!" Keene shouted.

"Where?"

"Don't know. Might've gotten caught in camp when this thing circled and almost caught the lot of us."

Somehow Steve doubted that Fallon had perished in the flames. Keene went on: "We're cutting a trail along here before she jumps the ravine. I guess we can make it. We've got to—otherwise there won't be a chance in hell of stopping this thing short of the lake." He pointed southward along the gully. "I've got fifty men falling timber and wetting the brush along the ravine. That bulldozer is going to be a mighty big help."

"Are you checking the spots?"

"Got five crews working on that, too. I've done all I can think of, but I'm glad you're here anyway, Steve."

Steve slapped at a glowing spark that

settled on his shirt. "Where are you pumping water from?"

"Creek, the other side of the draw. Plenty of water there."

"I brought some more line," Steve said. "Maybe you can use the bulldozer to cut a new channel and send the creek down this gully."

"Good idea," Keene said, and grinned for the first time.

STEVE went several hundred yards down the fire trail, watching the men at their work. This end of the fire seemed to be securely in check, and given a couple of hours without a high wind, and the raging fire would consume itself by nightfall. Men were shoveling dirt with a will, and on the flank of the fire line one of the straw bosses had started a back fire that already burned a smouldering black patch to windward of the gully. He coughed and covered his mouth with a handkerchief as a sudden downdraft sent thick smoke swirling around him. Through the smoke the fire was a dull, brutal red. Showers of sparks flew far over his head, but the spot fire crews would handle them. He turned back to the railroad and the burning trestle.

Keene's smoke-blackened figure appeared among the hose men. The man's white teeth glistened as he grinned.

"One good thing, anyway. That Hungerford guy is going to roast up on his mountain. The fire's eating all around his place. Fellow just told me he tried to put a call through and the lines went down in the middle of it. Said he was trapped, no way out."

Steve's face went grim. "We've got to get him out! And we've got to save the Stony Creek timber. That's part of our claim now. Get the boys I brought with me and round them up on the Shay."

"But what——?"

"Do as I say!" Steve snapped.

"You can't get through to the Hungerford place! How do you figure it?"

"I'll tell Olsen. Get moving!"

Keene shrugged and turned away, and Steve walked up the wet ties of the track to where the Shay stood, breathing in

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easy puffs of steam. The bulldozer was already snorting in the woods somewhere nearby, and the skeleton car had been uncoupled from the front of the locomotive. Olsen swung his fat figure into the cab beside Steve, bringing with him a smell of charred wood and smoke. The fireman and two brakemen joined him, and other men piled into the crummy with their tools.

"What's on your mind, Steve?"

"We have to cut a firetrail to save the Stony Creek timber," Steve said. "While we're at it, we'll pull old man Hungerford and those two girls out with him."

"But that's crazy! How do you expect to get up there?"

"We'll use the old spur that runs off the Y down the line."

Olsen looked scared. "Steve, I can't run this boiler on that track. It hasn't been used for years. We'll skip steel sure as frying. Besides, there's fire on both sides of that spur."

"Load some water barrels in here and in the crummy," Steve said. "We'll damp ourselves down and make a run for it. It's got to be done."

Olsen said: "This is like asking for a sample of Hades before your time, but you're the boss, Steve. We'll try."

It was a five-mile run back to the Y, away from the fire. Precious seconds ticked away while the rusted switch was thrown and the Shay, with the crummy full of men behind it, eased into the wavering grade of the abandoned logging spur. Olsen's face was tense as he eased the johnson bar forward and the locomotive picked up grumbling speed."

"Wish I'd said my prayers last night."

"You can say 'em now," Steve said grimly. "And just hope the trestles hold."

"This would be a tough enough run even in good times. This grade hasn't been checked since the K & H outfit folded up."

Steve didn't answer. Deep inside he felt a tight knot of anxiety. It was more than just the need to save the Stony Creek claim.

There was Amos Hungerford, and his crippled daughter, Anne; and there was Jean Gray who hadn't been out of his thoughts since he had first met her. He glanced anxiously up the rickety old track.

THERE was a thin streamer of smoke ahead, lying low across the grade between the encroaching trees. They passed a great gash in the timber, raw and red where the area had been logged, and then rumbled over the first trestle. Steve held his breath as the Shay swayed over the ancient track. He wondered how the men in the crummy felt, and then felt reassured by Olsen's calm face. They swung into a steeper grade and the smoke came again in a thick cloud that swirled into the cab.

The expansion joints of the rails clicked evenly under the locomotive's wheels. The speed of the Shay had slowed with the laborious uphill climb, but so far their luck held and there weren't any obstructions on the track. Steve didn't remember any from his hike down from Hungerford's the week before, but then he hadn't been looking at the grade with this crazy trip in mind. He couldn't be sure. He glanced back, and saw that they had already climbed a thousand feet from the mainline level.

Below and to the left, the fire seemed to have reached an even line and paused, and he knew that was where Keene had established his fire trail. So far, so good. But there was no telling whether the fire had already burst through across this line, or not.

The answer came soon enough. More smoke swirled down on the track ahead, and a bone-dry hemlock beside the rails suddenly burst into flames as if it had been bombed. They were past it the next moment, the Shay rocking perilously on the unballasted track. But there was more fire ahead, glowing dully through the dark smoke. The heat smote them like a living thing, billowing around the locomotive in staggering waves. Steve clung grimly to the window to scan the right-of-way. Olsen kept one hand on the throttle, the other on the brake lever. The fireman looked scared. A wall of flame appeared to the left of them, beyond a tall growth of spruce that swayed like reeds in the blast of hot wind. Steve glanced back and saw that the men in the crummy were dousing the car with water. He looked back at the engineer.

"One gets you ten," Olsen said grimly.

The wall of fire approached with alarming speed as they rumbled up the grade. The trees swayed until they almost formed an arch over the track. Fires blazed on the other side of the railroad, too, so that they were running a gauntlet of flames that roared and crackled and flung fiery arms at them as they sped through. For a moment Steve could see nothing, could no longer keep his head out of the cab window. There was a wild roaring in his ears, a splintering and screaming sound as if the trees themselves were shrieking in the hellish torture.

He glimpsed Olsen, head down in the heat, blind hands on the engine levers. The Shay trembled as if shrinking from the flames, but the wheels kept pounding over the rickety track. The tunnel of fire seemed endless. The heat was unbearable, A choking, frantic need for cool, fresh air made Steve gasp and finger his throat. Sweat streaked the blackened face of the fireman, leaving erratic white trails down his frightened features.

Heat and blinding flame roared about them. If any timber had fallen, blazing, across the rails as they plunged blindly through . . .

They burst through into clear, undefiled air with the suddenness of a thunderclap.

The change was startling, almost unbelievable as Steve drew great gulps of cool air into his fevered lungs. He saw Olsen grin and the fireman did a crazy dance on the hot floor plates of the locomotive. There came a cheer from the men in the crummy. Looking back down the track they had just covered, Steve winced and shuddered. The rails were swallowed by a rushing, roaring torrent of flame that blotted out the grade.

Ten minutes later Steve leaped from the cab of the Shay and stared up at the bluff where the Hungerford house was perched. Men poured from the crummy and handed each other their fire-fighting tools. There was little need to direct them at their work. They knew what they had to do, and Steve was free to follow his own course after a few moments.

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They had only a short lead on the fire that pursued them. This far, the timber was lost, with no chance of saving it. And from beyond the edge of the bluff could be seen more smoke and flames as an arm of the fire reached out behind the house, all but encircling it. Steve issued crisp orders to the Washburn men and turned his attention back to the house.

A quick fire trail and desperate efforts might possibly halt the flames here and prevent them from roaring down the other side toward Stony Creek. He waited another precious moment until he saw his orders being carried out, then started up the rough, rocky scarp alone, as fast as his strength and agility would permit him.

There was no sign of the Hungerfords until he reached the top of the climb. Then he saw them, over the lip of the bluff. Amos Hungerford's gaunt, white head towered over the two girls, and Steve's worry lightened at once as he glimpsed them. Amos was carrying Anne in his arms, toward the bluff, and Jean hurried along beside them. Across the lawn, the woods beyond were burning fiercely.

"This way!" Steve called.

Amos turned a startled face toward him and increased his stride, carrying his daughter in an iron grip. Jean's face was white as Steve took her arms.

"You shouldn't have come here," the girl said. "We've been cut off, except for Stony Creek, and we can't make it down there in time without the horses."

"What happened to them?"

"They ran away," the girl explained. "Fallon was here and went to get them but they saw the fire and bolted."

Steve said grimly: "Where's Fallon now?"

Hungerford replied: "I don't know and I don't care. How are we going to get through this fire?"

"We can't," Steve said. "All we can hope for is to stop the fire from getting through to us. We came in on the old spur track but there isn't chance of getting out that way now."

He was pleased by the cool firmness of Jean's hand as he helped her down the bluff toward the loggers working below. The fire trail was already well started, and off to the right, from his vantage point on the scarp, he could see two back fires already started. Beyond them, past a perilously thin strip of green timber, the main fire advanced at a steady pace, devouring the woods with fearful gulps and bursts of new flame.

VIII

HE COLLECTED the two girls and Amos Hungerford in the cab of the locomotive and turned away toward the fire trail. Jean ran after him for a few steps, out of earshot of the others.

"Steve!"

He turned. "What is it?"

"Do you really think we have a chance to get out?"

"I don't know," he said truthfully. "I don't blame you if you're frightened."

"I'm not frightened," she told him. "Not with you here."

Somehow their lips met, and Steve held her for a long minute. Then he grinned down at her smoke-smudged face. A burst of cinders fell around them, and she began stamping them out, blushing furiously.

"I didn't mean to let you know how I felt——"

"I'm glad you did," Steve said. "We'll talk about it later—if there is any later for us. You'd better get back to Amos now."

She obeyed without question, smiling and walking back over the gravel fan at the base of the bluff toward the locomotive. Steve watched her long, free stride and shook his head slightly in surprise at himself, then turned down the freshly cut fire trail toward the loggers. Every hand that could wield an ax or saw was needed, and he wasn't too taken aback when he noticed Uncle Amos' tall, white-haired figure lustily joining the fire-fighters at their labors.

He moved quickly along the base of the bluff into the timber, examining the land with appraising eyes. For a hundred yards or more, the air was clear, hot and dry. A crew of loggers went past him at a run, carrying hose toward a pool they had located. Steve watched them with grim eyes. Unless the blaze was halted here, they would all be caught in this trap he'd

led them to. He plunged deeper into the woods, toward the smoke down the slope.

Smoke blotted out the daylight in the timber, turning the scene into a nightmarish obscurity through which Steve groped and coughed, shielding his face from the heat. Another hundred yards, and he came out of the woods on a tumble of rock and gravel at the base of the bluff. The fire couldn't cross this natural break, and he nodded with satisfaction. Smoke billowed down on him again, blotting out the fan. He took a handkerchief and covered his mouth and started groping his way back to the locomotive.

He didn't see the other man until they almost collided in that gray nightmare of smoke and heat. The other was staggering blindly toward the sound of Steve's footsteps, a big, broken figure in charred and tattered clothing, his yellow hair blackened by the fire and his face seared by flame. He paused and swayed as Steve halted, and his eyes glared with blind insanity toward him.

It was Ernie Fallon.

Steve had only the briefest moment of recognition before the man launched himself at him. In spite of the ravages of fire, Fallon's strength was still double that of any ordinary man. Coupled with that was a long-handled ax gripped in his burned and blistered fist. Steve just had time to duck a savage blow of the ax and leap aside as Fallon rushed at him with blind hate. He ducked a second blow, then stepped in and grabbed for the ax handle with his left, and slammed knuckles into the insane face with his right. Fallon screamed in frustrated rage. Smoke swirled between them, blotting him out for a moment. He burst through it with another savage assault. Steve tried for the ax again, caught it, and twisted hard. Fallon hurled himself aside, trying to wrench free. Flames roared nearby, and the heat made the struggle a crazy thing out of a dream of death. He got the ax free at last. Fallon staggered aside, breathing great, raw gasps of smoke. Steve followed him grimly, throwing away the ax. His fists were all he needed. There was satisfaction in driving his right to Fallon's jaw

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again, countering the man's blow, and slamming Fallon to his knees. The big man crumpled suddenly in a fit of wracking coughs.

"Wait," he gasped. "Wait, I——"

"On your feet," Steve said harshly. "The boys are going to like seeing you, firebug."

"I didn't mean—I wasn't going to——"

Fallon collapsed in a fit of helpless sobs and coughs. Steve's grimness turned into an expression of disgust. He yanked the big man to his feet and sent him stumbling toward the bluff where the loggers were fighting the flames. The big man didn't resist. They were still in the thick of the woods when Hermit Henry appeared, shepherding two burly, familiar figures. Grady and Duncan! But Steve was beyond surprise now.

Hermit Henry hefted his rifle and grinned.

"Hi, Stevie. I see you got the last of these rats."

"How did you get here?" Steve demanded.

"I got a confession from these varmints," said the mountain man and chuckled. "I figured I'd show 'em to Fallon and clean it all up before the sheriff got here. I always hankered to be a detective once in my life. Fallon got away from me, though."

"He set this fire?"

"I wouldn't be surprised. The man is crazy, Stevie."

Steve nodded grimly. "Keep that rifle on them, Henry. The boys are going to want to tear these monkeys apart."

Fallon lifted his disheveled head. His eyes were rimmed with red, seared by smoke and fire.

"Don't let them," he croaked. His face twisted with fear. "I'll confess. But don't let them know I did it now!"

It seemed to Steve that the smoke was thinner and the heat lessened as they trudged back to the locomotive . . .

THE FIRE was halted. Amos Hungerford came striding from among the weary loggers, throwing aside his ax. His white hair was scorched and his face showed lines of exhaustion, but there was a grin on his stern, craggy face and lights danced in his pale eyes.

"Haven't had such a good time in years!" he grunted. His glance touched Steve and then shot to the crummy, where grim loggers were guarding Fallon and his two hoodlums. A shadow darkened the glee in his eyes. "I want you to know, Steve, that I'm ready to take whatever punishment is due me for the damage those men have done. But I didn't ask them to do things like this. I hired Fallon to give me a report on Kittredge's progress and let me know how things were going; I was planning to put pressure on Kitt and break him. I guess things were going too well to suit Fallon. He must have thought I would condone the manufacture of accidents and grief for Kittredge. He engineered those accidents and this fire without my knowledge, believe me. But I'll take whatever the courts hand out to me."

Steve grinned at the gaunt, white-haired man. He watched Hermit Henry send a stream of tobacco juice into the charred embers.

"I don't think the courts will give you much trouble. But you were licked anyway, Uncle Amos."

"How do you mean, licked?"

"I was over in Haines County last week, looking up the old records. Stony Creek doesn't belong to you. I've got the papers to prove it."

Amos Hungerford looked surprised, then grinned.

"Nonsense! I looked into that and had it straightened out long ago! Those papers don't mean a thing. I bought that property with hard cash five years ago."

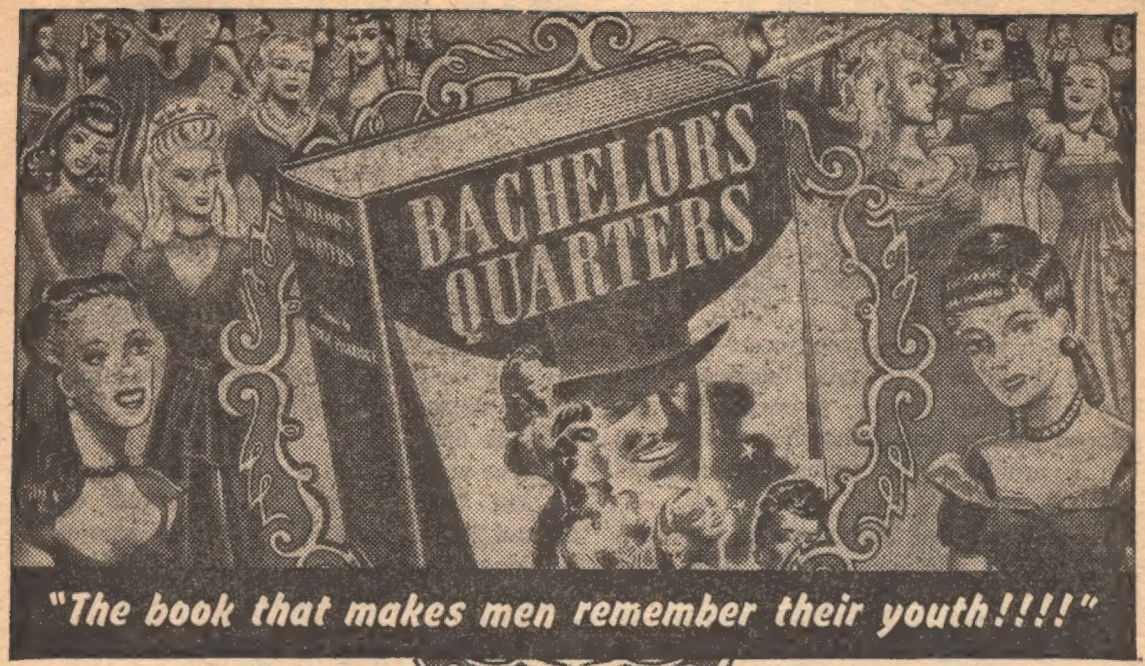
Steve felt a sudden sinking sensation of defeat.

"You mean Stony Creek is yours, after all?"

"Certainly!"

"And you won't let Kittredge log timber out of there?"

"I didn't say that," Amos Hungerford smiled. "I've been doing a lot of thinking these past few hours—especially since I got that logger's ax in my hands. You know, boy, I started out as a faller and built up the biggest timber company in



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the valley, when I was just about your age. Timber is in the family blood, Steve, but I was too stupid to accept it. Your loggers did plenty for me today, and I guess it isn't asking too much if I want you and Kittredge to log the Stony Creek claim for me! Besides, since you came back, Anne has been trying to talk some sense into me, and I guess she was right all along. I was just too stubborn to see it."

Steve said: "Then you mean——?"

"I'll be down to talk business with Kittredge first thing tomorrow." He slapped Steve's broad shoulder. "My boy, I'm a proud logger again, and it feels mighty good!"

It was several minutes later before Steve found a moment alone with Jean Gray.

The girl's face was smudged by smoke, and her clothes were charred by the scorching heat, but Steve still thought she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Her hand was cool as she slipped it into his. Cool and confident, returning the slight pressure of his fingers.

"You said some day, Steve, you had things to say to me," she smiled. "Isn't this the day?"

Steve walked with her toward the shade of the bluff. There were loggers all around them, sprawled on the ground, smoking and resting. They were too tired to pay much attention to him. Anyway, he didn't care if they watched him kiss Jean or not. He went ahead.

"This is the day," he replied.

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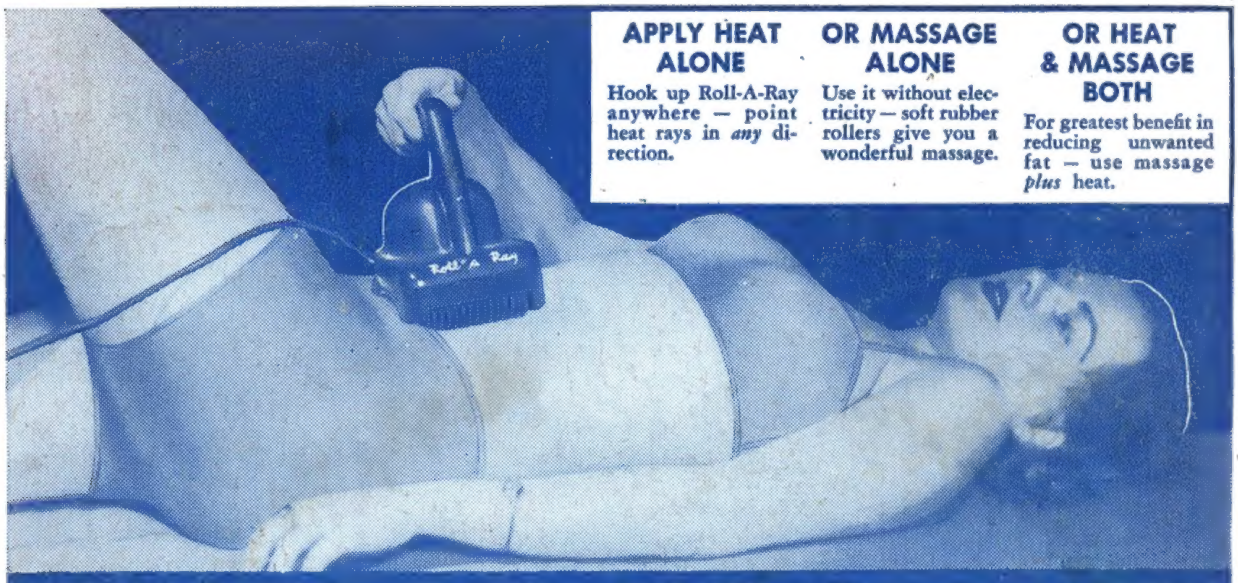

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